

In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

December 27, 1998

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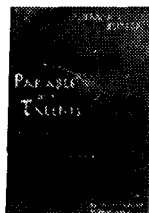
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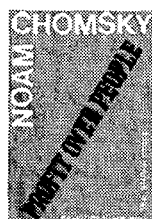
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Cover Photo: North Segregation Unit, Pontiac Correctional Facility, Pontiac, Ill. by George R. Sandona

Letters

Rent's Role Models

In Jane Goldman's "Gay Cachet" (Nov. 15), she quotes Sarah Shulman as saying, "Rent clearly depicts a world in which heterosexual love is true love. Homosexual love exists but is inherently secondary." Huh? Has either Goldman or Shulman actually seen *Rent* onstage? First of all, while Roger (a straight male) may be the protagonist of the musical, Angel, a gay transvestite, is clearly the most heroic character. Angel is the one who quells disputes, gives generously to both his boyfriend and the central characters, and is revered in a way befitting a character named after a celestial being. Additionally, it is clearly the homosexual relationship in *Rent* between Angel and Collins that is held as the standard of true love.

The only heterosexual relationship, that between Roger and Mimi, is fraught with tension and jealousy, and at one point Mimi even cries, "I'd be happy to die for a chance at what Angel had, someone to live for, unafraid to say I love you." For some reason, both Goldman and Shulman have decided to completely ignore the two most clearly positive characters, both of whom are homosexual.

Dan Gatti
Greensboro, N.C.

Jane Goldman responds: Positive gay characters can be gratifying, but I don't think they're the point. The central issues are whether a story allows gays to be subjects rather than objects (not just part of the

environment in which a straight-centered narrative unfolds), and whether it allows authentic gay experience to be the substance of its fictional world.

God's People

As a heterosexual male Christian and active church member, I concur wholeheartedly (and with a heavy heart) with Dave Cullen's indictment of the church for its failure to live up to its own teachings about inclusiveness ("Bullies in the Pulpit," Nov. 29).

My denomination, United Methodist, considers that "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching," will not ordain "self-avowed practicing homosexuals," and bans its clergy from performing gay weddings. No other group is singled out for such exclusion. This is sheer bigotry.

I am a retired United Methodist pastor who has been working on his homophobia for years. Many of us are in recovery on this issue, and a part of our acts of atonement is to work for a policy change in the denomination. I am proud to be a member of Dumbarton United Methodist Church in Washington, which is known as a "reconciling congregation." This designation means that the church is open and affirming of all persons without regard to sexual orientation. Among all the denominations, there are more than 800 such churches in the United States and Canada, and the number is growing steadily.

Harry C. Kiely
Silver Spring, Md.

Pinochet's Record

Larry Birns writes of media confusion and indifference to Chilean dictator Pinochet's brutal regime and, citing a *Washington Post* editorial, mentions that many have "gone so far as to posit that his lustrous 'economic miracle' and objectionable human rights policies cancel each other out" ("Pinochet, 'Miracle Worker,'" Nov. 29). As if to illustrate Birns' point, the *Post* subsequently published a letter on Nov. 1 in which the writer asserted that Salvador Allende "led Chile to the brink of collapse, with inflation out of control at some 2,000 percent."

What the letter writer, and apparently the *Post*, have forgotten is that Chile's economic disaster was not Allende's doing. Birns refers to "the shameful and breath-taking U.S. record of dirty tricks after Allende was elected in 1970." I think some details might be of interest.

In *The U.S. Intelligence Community*, Jeffrey Richelson, citing the findings of the Senate Intelligence Committee's investigations in 1976, writes: "The CIA attempted to create financial and political panic sufficient to produce a military coup. CIA Director Richard Helms' instructions from Nixon were to 'make the economy scream' and multinationals were approached to take such actions as cutting off aid to Chile, stopping the shipments of spare parts, and causing runs on financial institutions."

A. Rice
Great Falls, Va.

SYLVIA

By Nicole Hollander



Our National Epidemic

The United States, the world leader in imprisoning its own people, is in the midst of an incarceration epidemic. Nearly 1.9 million people are behind bars here.

This astonishing level of imprisonment is a recent development. For most of this century, the incarceration rate remained at about 110 inmates per 100,000 people, which is comparable to other industrialized countries. But in the mid-'70s, the rate began rising, and, by the '80s, it had doubled. In the '90s, it doubled again. According to the Sentencing Project, a Washington-based prison watchdog group, the rate is now 645 inmates per 100,000 people—six to 10 times the rate of most European countries. The rate in Britain, for example, is 100 per 100,000. In Norway and Greece it's 55 per 100,000. In Japan it's 37. Although China has about 10 times the U.S. population, we imprison nearly half a million more people.

Each year the United States adds another 50,000 to 80,000 inmates to its prison population. Based on an average growth rate of 6.5 percent since 1990, the inmate population in this country will easily surpass 2 million by the millennium.

Because crime rates have been falling since 1992, this incarceration explosion seems wildly incongruous. It can be explained in three words: war on drugs. The "get tough" policies of the federal government and nearly every state are responsible for the inmate boom. Figures from the Justice Department reveal that between 1988 and 1994, the number of prison inmates convicted of drug offenses increased by 155 percent. Thirty-one states now require mandatory prison sentences for drug offenses.

While African-Americans make up 12 percent of the total U.S. population, they comprise 51 percent of the nation's prison population. Black inmates' disproportionate presence in prisons is directly linked to the drug war. From 1985 to 1996, the proportion of African-Americans busted for drugs shot up 707 percent. Nationally, an estimated 1.4 million African-American males are disenfranchised from voting as a result of a felony conviction. This represents 14 percent of the adult black male population.

Although the most reliable studies indicate that African-Americans constitute about 13 percent of monthly drug users, they make up 35 percent of arrests, 55 percent of convictions and 74 percent of prison sentences for drug possession. This is largely a result of a federal law passed in 1986 that established harsher penalties for offenses involving crack cocaine than for those involving cocaine powder.

Defendants caught with 50 grams of crack are sen-

tenced to a mandatory 10 years—5,000 grams of powder are required for the same sentence. This 100-to-1 sentencing disparity is echoed in many state laws. The U.S. Sentencing Commission found that African-Americans accounted for 88 percent of those convicted of federal crack offenses. And although the commission recommended in 1995 that federal sentences for crack and powder be equalized, its recommendation was rejected by Congress.

In this issue, we look at two other disastrous aspects of the criminal justice system: the epidemic of rape inside women's prisons and the shocking number of innocent people sentenced to death for crimes they did not commit. Such horrifying stories demand real reforms.

Already, the astounding waste of human resources reflected in these figures and stories is attracting the attention of human rights groups and sparking the

The expanding prison-industrial complex is a scavenger enterprise feeding on social decay. By the millennium, it will incarcerate more than 2 million people.

beginning of a genuine prison reform movement. Increasingly, social analysts are condemning a criminal justice system that seems to be fueling—rather than dampening—crime.

Last September, a conference in Berkeley, Calif., brought together leading activists and experts in an attempt to jump-start a prison movement that's been moribund since the early '70s. Organized by Angela Davis, a former political prisoner and current professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz, the conference sought to publicize the plight of the nation's nearly two million inmates and jolt the American public into a realization of its complicity in a self-perpetuating dynamic that severely threatens the country's traditions of civil liberty.

The expanding prison-industrial complex is a scavenger enterprise feeding on social decay. Social conditions are channeling large numbers of inner-city African-Americans into the underground economy of drug commerce and, consequently, into prison. But instead of focusing on solutions to this waste of potential, our nation directs resources toward a new growth industry that depends on inmates as raw material. A society that links its economic success to its social failures is engaged in cultural cannibalism and is headed toward a harrowing future.

S.M.

Clinic Crimes: Lots of Talk, Little Action

By Annette Fuentes
NEW YORK

On Oct. 23, the night Dr. Barnett Slepian was killed by a sniper's bullet in his Amherst, N.Y., home, a group of abortion clinic violence experts shifted into high gear. They convened an emergency meeting and warned doctors that a killer was on the loose. They called the Buffalo clinic where Slepian had worked and other clinics to offer security expertise, and put out a request for federal marshals to be dispatched to high-risk clinics.

Was this the FBI? The Justice Department? Guess again. The crisis team was composed of members of Planned Parenthood, Feminist Majority and the National Abortion Federation (NAF), which represents 350 abortion clinics and providers. For more than a decade, these advocates have been gathering intelligence, providing security and documenting an escalating right-wing assault on women's right to choose.

They don't do this work because they relish the role or haven't bothered to seek assistance at every level of law enforcement—from the attorney general and FBI director on down to local police. But until Slepian was killed, federal law enforcement had approached anti-abortion violence as a political hot potato, according it attention only when forced to by a particularly vicious, public crime. Local police in many cities have reflected that federal ambivalence, allowing early ripples of trespassing, harassment and vandalism to become a tidal wave of arsons, bombings, shootings and, finally, murders.

Despite the killing of three doctors and four other clinic personnel since 1993, and five sniper assaults near the

New York-Canada border—including the one that killed Slepian—the FBI doesn't even consider clinic violence domestic terrorism. And until Slepian was killed, there had never been a permanent task force assigned to anti-abortion extremism. It's not that the Justice Department has been asleep at the wheel—it hasn't even been on board. "You sometimes check your own sanity because for so long we have been telling people about this danger," says Eleanor Smeal, president of the Feminist Majority Foundation in Washington, which launched a clinic defense project in 1989. "You're labeled 'conspiracy theorist.' But in fact, our knowledge level was based on experience and research, and we knew this was getting deadly. We asked for help from the federal government as early as the '80s."

If the country's top law enforcement agencies were disinterested in the issue

and killed Dr. John Britton and his bodyguard in Pensacola, and John Salvi killed two and wounded five others in a shooting spree at clinics in Virginia and Massachusetts. The momentum of violence was hard to ignore.

Pro-choice advocates won passage in 1994 of the federal Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrance Act (FACE), which criminalized clinic blockades and harassment. FACE gave the Justice Department a new weapon against anti-abortion extremists, and the agency has used it, bringing 27 criminal and 17 civil cases to court. "Prosecuting those cases has been a priority," says Justice Department spokeswoman Christine DiBartolo.

As important as those cases are, though, they are just the tip of a huge iceberg. In 1997, 13 percent of clinics reported FACE violations to the Justice Department, according to a Feminist Majority survey of 339 abortion providers. Of those, only one fifth said Justice opened an investigation. Nearly 25 percent of clinics reported severe violence, including bombings and threats, chemical attacks, stalkings, invasions and arsons. The rate of overall violence has been virtually constant since 1993.

Prosecution, of course, is not prevention, and the evidence is clear that when law enforcement has a high-profile presence at clinics, violence and harassment decline. Yet the same Feminist Majority survey found only 32 percent of clinics rated local law enforcement response to clinic violence as excellent; only 17 percent rated federal law enforcement as excellent—both rates lower than in 1993.

FBI spokesman Frank Scafidi says preventing crimes is not traditionally within the bureau's scope. "Most of what we do is after the fact," he says.

But jurisdictional limits aren't the only obstacle to battling anti-abortion extremists, says Ann Glazer, director of Planned Parenthood's Clinic Violence Project. Law enforcement is often



A woman, who later died, is moved from a Brookline, Mass., clinic, following John Salvi's 1994 shooting spree that killed two people and injured five.

back in the '80s, it's understandable. Those were the Reagan-Bush years, after all. But Bill Clinton was president in 1993 when the first doctor, David Gunn, was murdered during an anti-abortion protest outside a Pensacola, Fla., clinic. A year later, Paul Hill shot

JON HILL/BOSTON HERALD

ambivalent about anti-abortion violence. Local police have often been sympathetic to the clinic protesters, even as they broke the law. "We've had federal marshals show up at a clinic and say, 'I want to be clear. I'm on the other side,'" Glazer says. "It makes a difference if you see blockading as freedom of expression or as a criminal act."

"Police for a long time were doing these acrobatics with protesters, arresting them and then releasing them even if they gave fake names," Glazer continues. "The police should have been showing up the minute a demonstration was scheduled, and the minute someone broke the law they should have been put in jail." She says extremists like Charles Kopp, now sought in Slepian's killing, could escape without leaving a well-documented trail because of such lax enforcement.

Federal officials could have been pushing local law enforcement to be more vigorous in battling clinic violence. In 1995, President Clinton directed Attorney General Janet Reno to form local task forces on clinic violence that would respond to threats and criminal acts. Justice Department spokeswoman DiBartolo did not know the status of those local groups. But Glazer did. "The working groups are very sporadic. There is no reporting system in place at Justice," she says. "[Reno] is correct at putting the emphasis on local law enforcement, we agree. But if local officials aren't aware of how clinic violence works, they're stymied from the get-go."

Nowhere have law enforcement's failings on anti-abortion violence been more stunning than in Buffalo, N.Y., a conservative city whose former mayor invited Operation Rescue to protest there in 1992. "We could not communicate with the police," says Melinda DuBois, director of GYN

Womenservices, the clinic where Slepian worked and the site of daily protests. "The previous police commissioner made his feelings known, that this was a political issue and the police did not want to be involved." A traffic cop assigned to the clinic would sit in his car down the street, DuBois says, and they would constantly ask him to get

provided information on him to the FBI.

"Planned Parenthood's focus is health care and, all of a sudden, we had to be conversant in law down to misdemeanors," Glazer says. "We had to be adept at convincing the police these were criminal acts, not political expressions, and also keep track of where the 'antis' were and what they were doing."

Scafidi says the FBI can't keep track of all anti-abortion protesters or act on all threats clinics receive. "These are pretty touchy issues," he says. "In this arena, threats come by the thousands. There has to be some unique piece of information to cause people to take it seriously."

As for the investigation into Kopp, he says, "So you have information on someone who's been arrested 100 times. I'd liken it to the hundreds of people arrested in the civil rights movement. What makes [Kopp] rise above the others to make us follow him? It's a thin line between gathering information and interfering with their civil rights."

In the wake of Slepian's murder, pro-choice activists are hopeful that the Justice Department finally has been galvanized into action. On Nov. 9, Reno made the National Task Force on Violence against Health Care Providers a permanent body. Marshals have been deployed to high-risk clinics, like those in Buffalo, where DuBois says a new police commissioner and a heightened federal presence have transformed the environment.

But some fear that the federal commitment might fade. And there are regrets that the escalation of violence was not short-circuited years ago. "The issue should have been dealt with vigorously in the beginning," Glazer says. "If you look at the progression of terrorism, it started with blockades and crowds engaged in illegal activity. If law enforcement's response had been clear and decisive from the beginning, that progression would never have occurred." ■



Are FBI Director Louis Freeh and Attorney General Janet Reno doing enough?

out and walk around.

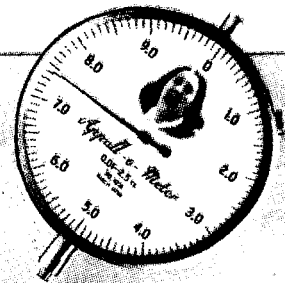
Federal agents weren't much more helpful. "An FBI agent came around six months ago saying she would be our contact. I faxed her the sniper alert from NAF. That was it," she says, referring to the warning issued a week before Slepian was killed. "They never informed us about anything happening out there we needed to know about. It's all been on our side. I think NAF knew more than the FBI."

DuBois may not be far off the mark. Pro-choice advocates have been forced into certain law enforcement roles by default. NAF has been meeting quarterly with the FBI since 1994, says executive director Vickie Saporta, updating them on patterns of violence and encouraging them to devote more resources to the problem. "It would be nice if people who are trained in intelligence gathering were doing this work," Saporta says. When Kopp was identified as a suspect, for example, the advocates

Appall-o-Meter

The In These Times Index of Indecencies

By David Futrelle



Terror in the Skies 7.3

Trade negotiators often play tough. But in late November, the *Wall Street Journal* reports, Japan thought—albeit only for one frantic hour—that the United States was playing a little tougher than usual. When Reuters reported that the United States was attempting to “hijack” a “Japanese plan” to fix its troubled markets, some reporters and government officials apparently misread “plan” as “plane”—and were convinced that American terrorists had hijacked a Japan Airlines jet ferrying several top officials to Malaysia. The plane landed safely in Kuala Lumpur, with no hijackers on board. “We were troubled by the rumors,” a spokesman for the foreign ministry told the *Journal*. “I mean, the U.S. hijacking a plane?”

Knock the Voter 8.4

Vote for me, you morons! Why did

Sen. Lauch Faircloth use so many negative ads in his bid for re-election this year? Because most of the voters he hoped to reach are just too stupid to understand anything more



subtle than that. “The average person watching television, who does not have your intellect, the average person doesn’t know what is going on in the real world,” Jonathan Hill,

one of the senator’s senior aides, told the National Association of Health Underwriters. “They are sitting there watching *Oprah* and what they see on television, they believe.” This November, viewers were treated to the sight of Hill’s boss losing his seat.

Guns and Money 8.6

Forget the toaster—how about a shotgun? Lincoln Security Bank of Newport, Ore., offered up free Weatherby rifles and shotguns to anyone who deposited \$2,500 in a Weatherby CD. “What’s the catch?” an ad for the deal in the *Newport News* asked. “We’ll have to keep your money in a government insured certificate of deposit for awhile. But in the mean time, you’ll be enjoying your Weatherby.” Just hopefully not in the bank’s main lobby with a ski mask stretched over your face. ■

More Hot Air

By Travis Lea

BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

On Nov. 14, after 12 days of intense negotiations and late-night sessions, delegates to the fourth U.N. summit on global warming declared the effort a success. More than 170 countries endorsed a plan of action that would enforce goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions agreed to last year in Kyoto, Japan. Industrialized countries consider the market-based plan a cheap and effective tool to fight global warming. But amidst the diplomatic fanfare, environmentalists are decrying the plan’s corporate approach to environmentalism and warn the plan could backfire disastrously.

Participants now have two years to detail the rules for implementing the agreement. If the plan continues as hoped, it will go into effect by the end of 2000, when at least 55 countries have ratified it. So far, only two have done so.

The Kyoto protocol calls for all industrialized countries to reduce their

emissions to 1990 levels by 2000 and to be, on average, 5 percent below that mark by 2012. The United States is committed to a 7 percent reduction; the European Union has set an 8 percent goal and Japan, 6 percent. Developing countries, who produce a small percentage of the world’s emissions, are exempt from these restrictions so that they can continue to develop their industrial sector before they agree to a low emissions cap. In Buenos Aires, the United States, arguing that their exemption would hurt American business, failed to push the developing nations to agree to reductions.

But the United States, Australia and other industrialized allies already had won a major battle in Kyoto by setting the course for a market-based approach to global environmentalism. The agreement creates a system of emissions credits that can be bought and sold on the open market. Those who create clean technologies earn extra credits, which could then be sold to a polluting country or company that can’t—or simply won’t—meet emissions restrictions. Stuart Eizenstat, head of the U.S. delegation,

praised the flexibility mechanisms, saying they allow countries “to chart their own sovereign paths to lower emissions.”

But environmentalists contend that this strategy would allow big polluters to buy up credits from countries that have struggled to earn them and effectively avoid emissions reductions.

A major conflict arose between Europe and the United States in Buenos Aires when E.U. representatives called for limits on credit trading. The European Union wants to prevent rich countries from avoiding reductions altogether by buying up as many additional credits as they can. Without limits, industrialized countries could continue to pollute as long as it was profitable.

“Money talks in Buenos Aires,” says Ji-Young Soh, a member of the Korean Ecological Youth, who came to Buenos Aires to protest the corporate approach to environmentalism. “We are forgetting the principles of the Kyoto protocol, and even it left much to be desired.” ■

Travis Lea is a writer and radio producer based in Buenos Aires.

The News Biz Goes Showbiz

By Danny Schechter

Tick, tick, tick go the promos for the new 60 Minutes, "62" in insider parlance, as a fresh wave of infotainment launches CBS's best branded program into the turbulent waters of prime time, sent to battle the Datelines and 20/20s that have, like kudzu, vined their way through the weekly schedule.

Two years ago, the networks and the cable news channels featured 26 hours of news magazine programming. This year, 63 hours are on the air.

Why the jump? There is an economic and media logic. Newsmags are cheaper to make than dramas or sit-coms, and the networks can repackage them without forking over pricey licensing fees. Increasingly, their mission is not to inform but to entertain with tried and true formulas—narrative arcs, character conflicts and dramatic structure.

The seven media conglomerates that rule our airwaves have merged news biz with showbiz. One consequence is the dumbing down of newscasts and the pandering to lowest-common-denominator taste. In the last few months, all the networks have been scrambling to cut costs as viewership dwindles. That has meant job losses as part timers replace full timers, and the networks adopt an aggressive attitude toward unions. At ABC, the network has locked out National Association of Broadcast Engineers and Technicians (NABET) employees who have been fighting for a contract for 18 months.

Meanwhile, word of cutbacks comes to our offices when job inquiries and unsolicited resumes multiply. News about the news is whispered on the phone, in leaks from disillusioned colleagues:

•At Fox News, some of the sharpest people in the business have been terminated. "They are finally doing it," says one staffer, "going tabloid all the way."

He tells me about a story meeting in which Fox executives explicitly call for more stories in the "naked and the dead" genre." (Norman Mailer take note.) When Rupert Murdoch launched the Fox News Channel, he boasted that it would offer "fair and balanced news" as opposed to CNN's "too liberal" bias. His latest news stars: Dick Morris and Matt Drudge.

•At NBC News, 200 to 300 employees were laid off this fall. Bureaus in Tokyo, Johannesburg (the last network outpost in Africa) and Denver were shuttered. NBC brags that it is number one in news; what it doesn't boast about is its strategy for getting there.



Alphabetic determinism is the rage: The two R's ("real and relatable") and 3 E's ("entertainment, education, and edification") guide the softening of NBC's "Your News" approach. "The truth is we use a human temperament approach to television," research director David Schiavone acknowledged in 1996, "and we do it in prime time and in news too." NBC just announced that it will out-tabloid Fox by cloning cheapo sleazementaries like *The World's Worst Car Crashes*.

•At CBS, about 120 newsies (no execs) were pink-slipped, in a cut ordered by Mel Karmazin, the ad salesman turned radio biz guru (and Howard Stern's patron) who runs Murrow's

house with moolah from Westinghouse. The CBS news department now reports to the entertainment division. Network watchers had predicted fewer cuts by Karmazin after the devastating downsizing imposed by ex-owner Larry Tisch. "There's nothing left to cut but bone," they sighed.

In a sign of more media consolidation, CNN is talking with CBS about linking news gathering. Already CNN reports are on CBS radio. CBS wants costs contained; CNN wants network access. An industry publication reports that both sides are arguing over control. CNN, meanwhile, unveiled its priority: a new multimillion dollar news stage set. Another sign of the times: The former president of CBS News was just named to head the Food Network.

•At Disney's ABC, staffers are furious over a management decision to "postpone" an investigative story about Disney World. David Westin, the corporate lawyer who now runs Roone Arledge's old turf, reportedly ordered producers to insure that all ABC stories include the "three C's: celebrity, calamity and sensationalism." For the new season, all news mags were rebranded 20/20 to keep name recognition simple.

Cynicism within the news media is growing. When asked about all the non-stop Monica coverage, one White House producer says, "This is no longer a story, it is an industry. They own channels and have to fill them." What an industry—where opinions are cheaper to rent than complex news is to report, where sit-com-like sensations are milked for months, while documentaries decline and world news disappears.

The media is no longer covering the world's problems. It has become one of the world's problems. And it needs more monitoring, critiquing and resistance. That's why a group of us are creating a new media and democracy supersite on the Internet called "The Media Channel." It's coming early next year to a computer near you (moreuwatch@globalvision.org). ■

Danny Schechter is executive producer of Globalvision and author of *The More You Watch, The Less You Know* (Seven Stories Press) and the forthcoming *News Dissector: Passions, Pieces and Polemics* (Electron Press).

Food Stamp Drop Spurs Fed Probe

By Neil deMause
NEW YORK

Attempts to throw obstacles in the path of welfare applicants may have hit a roadblock of their own: the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Alarmed by a precipitous drop in food stamp rolls, the federal agency is investigating whether welfare reform is to blame.

The number of people receiving food stamps nationwide has dropped 21 percent since 1996, according to USDA figures—a decrease that can't be fully explained by an improved economy. With state and local agencies scaling back welfare benefits since the elimination of Aid to Families with Dependent Children in 1996, officials grew suspicious that people were being illegally discouraged from applying for federal entitlements like food stamps and Medicaid. (The Department of Health and Human Services is conducting a separate inquiry into the Medicaid rolls.)

Federal scrutiny has focused on New York, where Mayor Rudy Giuliani and new welfare czar Jason Turner have embarked on a crusade to reduce the welfare rolls by any means necessary. One new policy is dubbed "diversion," whereby visitors to the city's newly renamed "job centers" are no longer given applications for aid on their first visit. Instead, applicants are directed to a "financial planner" who tries to dissuade them from applying; If they insist, they are given an appointment to file a combined application for welfare, food stamps and Medicaid at a later date.

This is all legal under the new welfare law, which gives states leeway as to what cash benefits—if any—to provide to their poor citizens. But food stamps and Medicaid are still considered entitlements, and federal law requires that they be made freely available to all eligible applicants on their first visit to a welfare office.

Welfare advocates say the diversion process may be outright denying people food stamps and Medicaid. Liz Krueger of the New York-based Community Food Resource Center has conferred with USDA officials on the problem, and says diversion workers often tell applicants "either 'you're not eligible,' 'we don't have

expedited food stamps anymore,' or 'there is a time limit, you don't want to be using your welfare now.'"

New York Human Resources Administration (HRA) officials estimate that 75 percent of welfare applicants are ultimately rejected, with only a handful receiving referrals for food stamps or Medicaid. And this figure counts only those who made it as far as filling out an application. According to one job center director, two-thirds of those who walk through the door never even return for the mandatory second visit.

When the *New York Times* broke the story of the USDA investigation on Nov. 8, the city's spin doctors went into overdrive. Giuliani denied that the city policy was illegal, blaming the controversy on "old regulations" and lashing out at the "left-wing advocates" and "apostles of dependency" who had dared criticize him. When HRA commissioner Turner announced that the city would respond by making food stamp applications available on a first visit to a job center, the mayor's office overruled him, declaring, "There is no reason to change the policies at the job centers in any respect. Everything HRA is

doing now is consistent with the welfare reform laws passed by Congress."

Welfare advocates are hoping that the USDA investigation will lead to a federal crackdown on welfare programs that throw entitlements out with the bath water. Thirty-four states have already implemented official diversion policies for welfare—national hunger groups have reported widespread problems—and a slap on the wrist to Giuliani would only exacerbate matters. "If the USDA finds that what New York is doing is OK, a lot of other areas probably would follow suit," says Stuart Campbell of the Washington-based Coalition on Human Needs.

At least one legislator has asked that the federal government expand its inquiry. After receiving reports of Milwaukee food stamp applicants who were turned away with only referrals to local food pantries or grocery store coupons, Rep. Tom Barrett (D-Wis.) asked the USDA on Nov. 19 to investigate diversion under the state's "W-2," a Turner-designed program that was the model for New York's welfare policies. "If that's identified as a pattern, we're hoping we can get it corrected," says Barrett spokesman David DiMartino, who notes that food pantry usage is up in his state at the same time the food stamp rolls are down. "We want to make sure that people aren't going hungry." ■

Neil deMause wrote "The Turner Diaries" in the Aug. 9 issue.



In the Eye of Hurricane Charity

By Juan Gonzalez

The face of Pedro Julio Sosa that afternoon was like so many others I'd seen in San Pedro de Macoris or a half dozen other towns of the Dominican Republic toward the end of September.

The old man, who hadn't slept or bathed in days, was still walking around in shock. Whenever he tried to describe how the raging waters of Hurricane Georges had swept away his house, he flailed his arms in all directions as if battling the storm all over again. Then he began to sob.



It was not supposed to be this way. Not in San Pedro. Not in the final week of a never-to-be-forgotten race with Mark McGwire into baseball immortality by town's idol and native son, Sammy Sosa.

Yet here was Sammy Sosa's uncle, suddenly homeless and broken, trying to figure out how to rebuild his life along with 300,000 other Dominican storm refugees.

And so it was this fall throughout the West Indies and Central America, as first Georges and then Hurricane Mitch swept through the poorest countries of our hemisphere, leaving behind more devastation than the region had ever experienced from either man-made or natural calamities. In Honduras and Nicaragua, the death toll surpassed 12,000, with another half a million left homeless.

When the news pictures reached this country's living rooms, stunned Americans picked up their telephones to offer money or rummaged through closets and pantries to donate food and clothing. "It's the highest call volume we've ever had for a disaster," Ann Stringle of the American Red Cross said in late November.

But the spontaneous generosity of the American people was not reflected in the government or the corporate board rooms. Nearly three weeks after the storm, Octavio Pineda, the Honduran consul general in New York City, was still desperately trying to find a plane to transport some 200,000 pounds of canned goods, bottled water, medicine and clothing that was piling up in warehouses around the New York metropolitan area. "People are dying of hunger, 70 percent of the population doesn't have potable water, and we can't get a single plane," Pineda says.

A New York National Guard spokesman said his troops were preparing pallets of relief supplies but could not ship them to Central America without Pentagon authorization, which as late as Thanksgiving eve had still not been given.

The Clinton administration, which at first announced a paltry few million dollars in aid, kept raising the figure. By the time Tipper Gore visited the region in the second week of November, the United States had pledged \$45 million. A week later, when Hillary Clinton paid a visit, it jumped to \$250 million for Honduras and Central America.

That sounds like a lot of money until you look a little deeper. Even before Hurricane Mitch, 40 cents of every dollar that both the Honduran and Nicaraguan governments spent was going to pay their foreign debt. In Honduras' case alone, that equals \$60 million a month. Thus, the total U.S. aid package to both countries amounts to just four-months worth of Honduran debt.

The people of Central America and the Caribbean don't need charity. They need, at minimum, cancellation of all their foreign debt until they are able to rebuild their infrastructure, replant their crops and create new housing.

Worse than the government have been the transnational corporations. Take American Airlines, the dominant U.S. carrier in the region. After Hurricane Georges, American offered slightly

The people of Central America don't need charity. They need cancellation of their foreign debt while they rebuild and replant.

discounted fares to the Caribbean for those wanting to visit relatives. It contributed almost no money to disaster relief but it did donate \$300,000 to the Puerto Rico Tourist Board for a big advertising campaign to bring back tourists. The campaign only coincidentally benefited, guess who?

Or take Johnson & Johnson, whose nine factories in Puerto Rico have produced an average of \$100 million annually in tax-free profits for the company for decades. It gave a \$50,000 donation to the Puerto Rico Red Cross and \$45,000 worth of what a company spokesman called "emergency personal care products."

Executives at some huge corporation contribute \$50,000 to hurricane relief, then spend nearly as much publicizing what they gave. The Clinton administration officials give enough aid so the afflicted countries won't default on their debt to our bankers. They all can now congratulate themselves on their charitable spirit and start planning their Christmas celebrations. Yet, no one can find planes to ship what the American people have already given and the mass media is moving on to the next international tragedy. Back in the eye of the storm, millions sink deeper into misery. ■

CRIMINAL INJUSTICE SYSTEM BY CRAIG AARON

CHICAGO

By the time you are reading this, the United States has probably executed its five hundredth prisoner since 1976. If not, it's just a matter of days before Oklahoma, Texas, South Carolina or Arkansas straps Tuan Nguyen, Joseph Faulder, Joe Truesdale, Robert Robbins or another of the nation's more than 3,500 death row inmates onto the gurney or into the electric chair and kills them.

Number 500

easily could have been any one of the 29 former death row inmates who nervously lined up backstage at the National Conference of Wrongful Convictions and the Death Penalty on Nov. 14. Each of these men and women were once sentenced to die; some came within hours of being executed—all were innocent. They each spent years, and sometimes decades, on death row for crimes they didn't commit. Only with a stroke of lottery-like luck, divine intervention and a few good lawyers were they freed. One by one, they marched onto the stage, stepped up to the microphone and told the crowd, "If the state had gotten its way, I'd be dead today."

More than 1,000 lawyers, law students, scholars, investigators, journalists and people in "Free Mumia" T-shirts gathered to hear from the wrongfully convicted at Northwestern University Law School in Chicago last month for the three-day conference, one of the most important, uplifting and well-publicized anti-death penalty events of the decade. Conference organizers hoped to present the face of "the real death penalty" to counteract the fact that, in theory at least, two-thirds of Americans support capital punishment. The conference dramatically demonstrated that, in practice, the death penalty isn't just reserved for the Ted Bundys and John Wayne Gacys—it also condemns innocent people like Gary Gauger, Freddie Pitts and Walter McMillian.

Indeed, since the Supreme Court overturned *Furman v. Georgia* in 1976 and reinstated the death penalty, 75 death row inmates have been completely exonerated and released. That means that for every 7 prisoners executed, one was set free. The stories of each of these men and women are a powerful testament to the fallibility of the criminal justice system. They also suggest a path of reform. Since the United States isn't ready yet for outright abolition, death penalty opponents should pursue pragmatic, sensible reforms that could make the system fairer and more equal—and save lives.

The stories of the wrongfully convicted are overwhelming. Most involve some combination of incompetent defense lawyers, bloodthirsty or corrupt prosecutors, hanging judges, police beatings, hidden evidence or false testimony. Many are stories of simply being in the wrong place at the wrong

time, poor or black: "We need someone for this," a police officer told Clarence Brandley, who was wrongfully convicted for rape and murder in Texas in 1980. "Since you're the nigger, you're elected."

The wrongfully convicted tell of sitting in closet-sized cells for 23 hours a day, writing out legal briefs longhand with a

A 75-COUNT INDICTMENT AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY

dull pencil and fighting off the roaches and mice for table scraps; they speak of the endless waiting, always thinking about burning alive in the electric chair or being stuck with a lethal needle. "I just wanted to curl up in a ball, scream and holler and bang my head against the wall," says Carl Lawson, who spent six years on Illinois' death row. "I thought, I'd rather be dead than live here in this cell. I felt like the whole world hated me. I had to push so hard to keep from killing myself."



Rolando Cruz spent 10 years on Illinois' death row for a crime he didn't commit. Sonia Jacobs was in Florida prisons for 16 years before being exonerated.

Even freedom comes with a price. After years in prison, most of the wrongfully convicted have struggled on the outside without any skills, job prospects or compensation from the state. Topping it off, they have been held up as examples of how the system works. Try telling that to James Richardson, who was on death row for 21 years. Or Sonia Jacobs: After spending 16 years in prison for the murder of two policemen, it was exposed that prosecution witnesses had lied at her trial. She was released in 1992. Her common-law husband, Jesse Tafero, wasn't so lucky. Convicted on much of the same evi-

dence, he was executed in 1990 before the new information came to light. "These men and women were not released because of the system," says Michael Radelet, co-author of *In Spite of Innocence*, a book about the wrongfully convicted, which documents 23 cases of the innocent being executed this century. "They were released in spite of it."

To appreciate the impact of these stories, consider Illinois: Since 1987, nine inmates on the state's death row have been freed. Their cases have created a new awareness of wrongful convictions and official misconduct. Northwestern law professor Larry Marshall, who helped free several of the men and was the driving force behind the Chicago conference, reports a feeling that many trial courts and juries are being more careful than they used to be. In 1997, the Illinois Supreme Court granted some form of relief in half of the capital cases before it—an extremely high percentage compared to other states. And, just a week before the conference, Illinois Supreme Court Justice Moses Harrison wrote a scalding opinion about the state's handling of capital cases. "If these men dodged the executioner, it was only because of luck and the dedication of the attorneys, reporters, family members and volunteers who labored to win their release," he wrote. "The truth is that left to the devices of the court system, they would probably have all ended up dead at the hands of the state for crimes they did not commit. One must wonder how many others have not been so fortunate."

The impact of these cases goes beyond the courtroom. Republican Gov. Jim Edgar signed a bill in 1997 that gave prisoners the right to post-conviction DNA testing. And,



The wrongfully convicted celebrate freedom.

following the February 1997 call by the American Bar Association for a halt to executions until states can ensure greater fairness and due process, the Illinois legislature is now considering a one-year moratorium.

Of course, the only way to ensure that no innocent person is executed is to abolish capital punishment altogether. That remains a noble goal, but it's unachievable in the current political climate. Clearly however, issues of innocence, equality and fairness resonate with the public. Using the

example of the wrongfully convicted as a springboard and focusing on the realities of the death penalty, opponents should push for specific, achievable systemic and legislative reforms. "We have to get back to putting fairness ahead of finality," says attorney Steven Bright, director of the Southern Center for Human Rights. "We need to get back to achieving equal justice under the law, or we should just sandblast those words right off the front of the Supreme Court building."

First, safeguards are needed before a case ever gets to court. "If you pushed me against the wall and said I could pick one reform and nothing else," says Jay C. Smith, a former high school principal who was wrongfully convicted in Pennsylvania, "it would be to make sure there's an integrity to the initial investigating process. That's what hangs you." In Smith's trial, one of the police investigators hid exculpatory evidence in his attic.

While this type of criminal activity is impossible to regulate, false or coerced confessions—the source of many wrongful convictions—could be prevented by videotaping interrogations. This idea recently got a lot of attention in Chicago, where, after hours of intense questioning, police mistakenly charged two young boys with the murder of an 11-year-old girl. States should follow the example of Minnesota and Alaska, where the entire interrogation process—not just the confession—is recorded. This reform is good for both the prosecution and the defense. "Videotaping interrogations from the very beginning and showing them to juries," Marshall says, "would save us from wrongful convictions and wrongful acquittals."

Once in court, perhaps the most dubious evidence used to send prisoners to death row is the testimony of jailhouse snitches. Nearly a third of the 75 innocent former death row inmates were convicted as a result of false testimony, usually by cellmates looking for reduced sentences or the real perpetrators claiming them as accomplices. This is a more difficult area of reform, because of the strong resistance of prosecutors to any limit on their power. But, in a closely watched case, the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver is considering whether prosecutors can legally offer money or reduced sentences in exchange for testimony. Lawyers for Sonya Singleton—a woman sent to jail on the word of a convicted drug dealer, who testified in exchange for a lesser sentence—argue that offering "anything of value" constitutes bribery, even when it's done by the government. A three judge panel recently agreed, challenging decades of legal practice. The case is likely to reach the Supreme Court, and the Justice Department is already lobbying Congress for legislation to protect prosecutors. "If the case has done nothing else," says attorney John Val Wachtel, "it has pointed out to the courts a real evil that is going on. Even if Sonya loses, the principle may win in the long run."

The most vital factor in whether someone ends up on death row, however, is not the severity of the crime, class or race—it's quality of counsel. Among death row inmates, cases of incompetent lawyers failing to interview key witnesses, challenge flawed forensic evidence or mount even a basic defense are a dime a dozen. Though capital defense proceedings are the legal equivalent of brain surgery, defense attorneys with nothing more than three years of law school and the bar exam behind them can take a life in their hands.

Their mistakes at trial often set up insurmountable obstacles on appeal. At the very least, minimum levels of capital defense training and courtroom experience should be required when a life is on the line.

Then there's the problem of funding: A capital defense case requires multiple lawyers, investigators and support staff to give the defense a fair chance against the unlimited resources of the state. This can be extremely expensive: A large Houston law firm spent more than \$3 million defending Ricardo Aldape Guerra, who spent 15 years in Texas prisons for a crime he didn't commit. It took more than \$1 million to free Frederico Macias in the same state. Hundreds of death row inmates don't even have lawyers to handle their appeals. The Chicago conference launched an "Innocence Network" linking law schools working on wrongful convictions to help find cases, recruit lawyers and teach law students to do *pro bono* work.

Building a network to investigate and litigate cases of wrongful conviction is even more crucial in the face of political efforts to limit the appeals of death row inmates and speed up the rate of executions. In 1996, Congress placed stricter limits on post-conviction *habeas corpus* appeals in the federal courts—a refuge for the wrongfully convicted—where judges are appointed for life and face less political pressure. Congress also cut funding from the Capital Resource Centers (CRCs), 20 facilities throughout the country that helped to recruit lawyers, coordinate efforts and file well-researched briefs for capital defense cases. Not only did the CRCs provide inmates with an adequate defense, but they helped smooth out the appeals process. Unfortunately, CRCs were too good at defending death row inmates and discovering constitutional errors, so Republicans shut them down. Re-establishing the CRCs is a top legislative priority.

While it's a long shot in this Congress, the wrongfully convicted could make excellent lobbyists.

The median length of time it took for the 75 wrongfully convicted death row inmates to be vindicated was 7 years: Speeding up the rate of executions will only lead to more fatal mistakes. "So what if it takes ten years?" asks Randall Adams, the former Texas death row inmate, who was freed after 12 years, thanks in part to the film *A Thin Blue Line*. "At least it's an improvement from when they used to take you out in the street and hang you."

There is some good news: In recent years, DNA testing has exonerated more than 50 prisoners, including 11 death row inmates. Hundreds more cases are pending. Yet currently only New York and Illinois have laws that provide inmates access to potentially exculpatory biological evidence without limits on cost or time. In fact, according to Amnesty International, more than 30 states mandate time limits on the admissibility of any new exonerating evidence post-conviction; in 12 states, defendants have less than 30 days to introduce new evidence. DNA is the most promising recent development in identifying and freeing the wrongfully convicted, and it's only fair that every state give inmates unfettered access. "It's so important in this debate to look back at the people who we said were guilty as all hell, that through DNA were found to be absolutely innocent," Marshall says. "This is a huge breakthrough in forensics and hundreds, and thousands will be vindicated. If that is the case, how can we be killing anyone who claims an issue of innocence?"

DNA is not a panacea. It isn't even left at most crime scenes. The wrongfully convicted like Rolando Cruz of Illinois and Kirk Bloodsworth of Maryland were able to use DNA evidence to help prove their innocence only because

MUMIA UPDATE

BY BRIAN KATZ

On October 29, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court upheld Mumia Abu Jamal's 1982 conviction for the murder of a Philadelphia policeman, bringing to a close Jamal's 16-year fight for a new trial in Pennsylvania. His lawyer, Leonard Weinglass, promises to appeal to federal court. Pennsylvania governor Thomas Ridge, long eager to sign a new death warrant, will likely set an execution date for 1999.

Weinglass argued in his appeal that Jamal's original trial was unfair and that infamous "hanging judge" Albert Sabo was biased in favor of the prosecution. Furthermore, since that trial, witnesses have claimed they were pressured by police, and new witnesses have come forward contradicting police accounts. However, the state Supreme Court rejected every single point of appeal made by Weinglass.

Jamal narrowly escaped death once before. Originally scheduled for execution on August 17, 1995, he was granted a stay only 10 days prior, saved by a now-famous protest campaign led by human rights groups and international dignitaries. His supporters have proliferated since, growing to almost cult-like proportions. Jamal has also gained considerable attention from the mainstream media,

making him by far the most prominent death row prisoner in the United States today.

Despite the often overblown rhetoric of his supporters, the issues that Jamal has come to represent are undoubtedly some of the most urgent for progressives. His case resonates not only for its particular instances of bias, but because it symbolizes the decline of black radical politics and the continuing triumph of an unfair legal system, which has hounded blacks since the days of slavery.

His case also is remarkable for the seemingly personal vendetta the Philadelphia Police hold against him. The Fraternal Order of Police took out a full-page ad in the *New York Times* this June supporting his execution and pressured National Public Radio back in May 1994 to cancel a broadcast of Jamal's commentaries. The heavy-handedness of a police organization endorsing the execution of an individual serves to further undermine, in the eyes of his supporters, any impression of fairness for Jamal.

His case exemplifies both these extremes: the possibilities of activism, as well as the power of the legal system. In a reflection of the hard line on crime that has become standard on the American political landscape, the legal system remains impervious to the popular enthusiasm and interest in this case. ■

their cases involved rape. However, the high number of recent exonerations thanks to DNA does expose the unreliable nature of some evidence like eyewitness identification.

Some death penalty opponents are critical of a focus on systemic and procedural changes. "We need to be talking less about the struggle within the system and more about the political struggle," says Marlene Martin of the Campaign to End the Death Penalty. "We must challenge the politicians. They know full well that the death penalty is applied in a racist way and that innocent people have been put on death row—they read the papers. We must put pressure on the politicians and understand their instinct to use the death penalty for political gain."

It's true that reforms, systemic and otherwise, will never be implemented without public pressure. From the outside, one of the most powerful arguments against the death penalty is its racial inequality. It's common knowledge that blacks are executed for killing whites, but whites are not executed for murdering blacks. Still, some statistics bear repeating: One study of Philadelphia found the odds of receiving the death penalty are four times higher if the defendant is black. At one point, all 39 people on Kentucky's death row were there for killing a white person, even though a thousand blacks had been killed in the state during the same period. Meanwhile, in the 38 states with capital punishment, 98 percent of prosecutors responsible for the decision to seek death are white, according to a 1996 study by the Death Penalty Information Center.

In March 1998, the outrageous racial disparity spurred passage of the Racial Justice Act in Kentucky, giving defendants the right to introduce statistical and other evidence of racial

bias in their defense. Attempts to pass similar legislation in Congress have failed. With Congress paying closer attention to the black vote following the November election, the time is ripe to push for federal legislation again.

The innocent on death row highlight a much larger crisis. Radelet says the wrongfully convicted also include those who killed accidentally or in self-defense, had improper counsel, have little mental ability, are children or should have been charged with a lesser crime. "What about the innocent doing life, doing two years," Adams adds. "If mistakes can happen with the ultimate penalty, how many other mistakes are happening?"

Some studies suggest that the rate of wrongful conviction for lesser crimes such as sexual abuse is much higher than for murder. "Capital punishment is the capstone in the war against the 'other,'" says Robert Meeropol, a leading activist whose parents, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, were executed in 1953. "It shows that it is a war, a place where life imprisonment without parole seems humane. If we don't place it in the larger context of the prison industrial complex, we may win a narrow victory, but we lose the larger battle."

Nonetheless, the 75 innocent people released from death row serve as a powerful indictment of the criminal justice system and the continued use of capital punishment. "We are alive today despite the criminal justice system's intense efforts to kill us for crimes we did not commit," reads a statement signed by the former death row inmates at the conference. "It is our fervent hope that society is capable of learning from its mistakes." ■

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Address written correspondence to John Russo, Labor Studies Program, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, Ohio 44555 or fax (330) 742-1459. E-mail inquiries should be sent to Sherry Linkon at sjlinkon@cc.ysu.edu.



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RAPE CAMP USA

BY CHRISTOPHER D. COOK & CHRISTIAN PARENTI

In December 1996, inmate Heather Wells was sexually assaulted in the prison laundry room at the Washington Corrections Center for Women in Purdy. Her pregnancy tests returned positive, and Wells, 11 years into a 20-year prison sentence for murder, accused the father—corrections officer Michael Stevens—of rape.

Wells, now mother to a 1-year-old baby girl, is still stuck in prison. Just weeks after her daughter Arieona was born, the state ripped the baby from Wells' breast and put the infant in a foster home. "It sounds strange, but having a baby was one of the best things that ever happened to Heather," says her attorney, Erik Bauer. "Despite the rape, she wanted to keep that child, and now she can't."

The evidence of a sex crime couldn't be more blatant: Wells became pregnant in an all women's facility where many of the guards are men. But so far state officials have yet to file charges—despite a paternity test in June proving Stevens is the father. Wells is suing the state for \$5 million. Stevens quit his job and has quietly moved out of state. Just a few months before Wells filed suit, Washington paid \$110,000 to former inmate Stephanie Hamilton-McKendry—she too was raped and impregnated by a guard who had previously been found guilty of sexually assaulting other female prisoners.

The plight of Heather Wells is alarmingly common. There's a Bosnia-like epidemic of rape and psychosexual torture going on inside America's prisons. In public and private facilities across the United States, female inmates are routinely forced into performing strip teases, lap dances and sexual favors. They are raped regularly by guards, medical staff and even male prisoners—who pay corrections officers for access to women inmates housed in adjoining prison wings.

Rape in prison is hardly new—but with more and more women doing time, the Big House is being transformed into a veritable rape camp. The "war on drugs" has jacked up arrests and incarceration of women. Between 1980 and 1994, the female prison population skyrocketed by nearly 500 percent (compared with 300 percent for men), according to the National Women's Law Center (NWLC). And while the widening U.S. law-enforcement dragnet puts more women behind bars, most of the guards holding the keys are still men.

A raft of lawsuits in recent years has uncovered sexual abuse and violent psychological torture in prisons across the United States:

- Rape and assault was so widespread in Arizona's prisons that the Justice Department filed suit in March 1997, charging that state corrections officials were "consciously aware of, but deliberately indifferent to" a "pattern" of sexual abuse and

misconduct. Nearly a dozen female inmates testified that they frequently had been forced to touch male prison employees, and to allow staff to fondle them while others watched, the *Arizona Republic* reported.

- In March 1998, a federal judge awarded \$500,000 to three women inmates who had been sold as sex slaves by male guards during their imprisonment at a men's solitary confinement unit in Dublin, Calif. On Sept. 25, 1995, one of the women was raped, sodomized and then severely beaten in retaliation for reporting the abuse. Eight prison officials, including the former western regional director for the federal Bureau of Prisons, were implicated in the lawsuit. The penalty? Unemployment.

- Delaware inmate Dorothy Carrigan got just the evidence she needed to sue a guard who allegedly raped her in her cell in March 1995—he tossed the used condom on her bed and told her to flush down the toilet. But after filing a complaint with prison officials, Carrigan told the *New York Times*, she was placed in solitary confinement in a maximum security prison and beaten and harassed by guards; she later attempted suicide.



DON B. STEVENSON

A chain gang lines up at the Maricopa County Jail in Phoenix, Ariz.

The list goes on. An exhaustive 1996 study of 11 states by Human Rights Watch (HRW) revealed the U.S. prison system's dirtiest secret. The group found that rape and sexual assault were pervasive in all of the states, as was brutal retaliation against prisoners who report the abuses. Male officers "have used their near total authority to provide or deny goods and privileges to female prisoners to compel them to have sex or, in other cases, to reward them for having done so," says the report, based on hundreds of interviews with prison inmates, staff and advocates.

Deprived of basic necessities, women prisoners are cornered into having sex with corrections officers who promise "perks"

such as cigarettes, library access or adequate supplies of soap. Women who refuse guards' advances or dare to complain face brutal beatings and solitary confinement. "These guards are trained to physically and psychologically dominate these women," says Regan Ralph, co-author of the HRW report. "The widespread sexual abuse is really born out of the more routine aspects of prison life."

Even when female prisoners speak out, file suit and win, the sexual abuse often continues. Prisoners may be transferred, correctional officers disciplined or fired, and new policies put in place. But the prison remains a secret authoritarian world where anything goes, and where physical and psychological control is the only rule that's sure to be enforced.

The prisons of Washington, D.C., offer perhaps the most lurid example of violent libido in lockup. According to attorney Brenda Smith of the NWLC, the D.C. county jails are a veritable sex-torture chamber, where "anything you can imagine" goes on. Smith discovered this rape epidemic at a legal service clinic in 1991. "We had been running a pregnancy educational program focusing on rehabilitation and life skills," she recalls. "More and more women were showing up pregnant." According to Smith, 400 women become pregnant each year in D.C.'s jails. Guards, she says, are "strongly encouraging abortions."

Asked to explain the rape crisis, Jimmie Williams, commu-

nications director for the D.C. corrections department, responds: "I don't think anyone can answer that question. It happens in prisons all across America—sex is a normal part of prison life. ... People are locked up and forced to live a celibate life—I guess those desires get out of hand. It's not proper, but it happens. I don't think anyone [on the outside] really knows what goes on inside of those cell blocks—they've got their own set of rules."

Until recently at D.C.'s Lorton minimum-security facility, about 175 women slept in open dormitories and walked the halls with male prisoners. Male prisoners had so much access to women inmates, Lorton was known as the "Swiss cheese" jail. To go to "chow," the women had to "run a gauntlet of sexual harassment," Smith says, passing between fenced-in male exercise yards with throngs of men cat-calling and exposing themselves. Williams declined to comment on conditions at Lorton or other D.C. jails under suit, but said there are no longer any women at Lorton.

With Smith's help, women in three D.C. jails sued the Department of Corrections in October 1993. The class-action suit was a catalog of horrors, charging that guards and officials committed numerous sexual assaults on women prisoners and "acted with deliberate indifference to the abuse." The women won. In a December 1994 ruling, District Court Judge June L. Green cited "a general acceptance of sexual relationships between staff and inmates" and ordered the prisons to imple-

ABUSE IN THE HOLE

California, which holds the largest number of incarcerated women in the United States, is home to the world's largest women's prison complex, the Central California Women's Facility and Valley State Prison in Chowchilla. In these facilities—where the majority of the correctional staff are men—there have been widespread allegations of sexual abuse.

Since June, three San Francisco-based prisoner advocacy organizations have focused their efforts on charges of intimidation and sexual abuse in Valley State's Security Housing Units (SHUs), where inmates are kept for extended periods of time in solitary confinement. According to Valley State spokesman Rick Allen, 44 female inmates—out of a total prison population of nearly 4,000—currently are housed in the prison's SHU unit.

While prison officials explain that SHUs help to keep the rest of the prison population safe from threatening or violent inmates, Michelle Foy of California Prison Focus (CPF) says that SHUs are used to punish prisoners who dare to speak out. "We've found that they target prisoners who litigate," she says, "prisoners who challenge unjust policies and human rights abuses within the prison system."

Earlier this year, women prisoners at Valley State filed an internal complaint, alleging sexual misconduct and abuse

by numerous correctional officers. Subsequent interviews by CPF found that the women were complaining of daily mistreatment by guards, including improper touching, verbal harassment, leering at women in the showers and sexual assault.

Facing pressure from prisoner advocacy organizations, the California Department of Corrections (CDC) launched

an internal investigation into the allegations. According to CDC spokeswoman Terry Thornton, their research into this matter found that the bulk of the allegations were "untrue or exaggerated." A few cases continue to be "actively investigated."

Foy says that guards who have been accused of sexual abuse are still in positions where they can have regular physical contact with their alleged victims. Thornton downplays the charges. "Because of the design and number of staff assigned to the SHU," she says, "any misconduct by any staff member would be observed by other staff and inmates."

Foy stresses that women imprisoned in SHUs are held in lockdown 23 hours a day in small cells with steel doors. "The basis of SHUs is isolation," she says. "If a guard does something to a woman, there are no other prisoners to witness that. Things happen in really isolated situations. There's plenty of room for them to get away with this stuff. And they do." ■

Silja J.A. Talvi is a Seattle-based writer.



A cell in the Pontiac Correctional Facility's North Segregation Unit in Pontiac, Ill.

GEORGE R. SANDOVA

ment 19 policies prohibiting sexual abuse. The Washington City Council promptly outlawed sex between prison employees and inmates. During the trial, former jail administrator Howard Ray Jr. testified, "You just get this sense that [sexual misconduct] has always happened and that it is always going to happen." Ray's comments proved prophetic.

July 20, 1995: The air inside the D.C. jail is thick with humid heat. Jail staff have opened all the cells. Soul music bounces off the sticky concrete walls and steel bars. Down at the end of the tier the officer in charge, Yvonne Walker, starts dancing and inmates join in. Before long, one prisoner is undulating on a table, half-naked. Soon, Walker is partially disrobed, while another inmate is performing a sex trick with a lit cigarette. In a toxic blend of chaos and coercion, corrections officers begin calling for other inmates to strip. "Sunday is a dancer, too," someone shouts, referring to inmate Sunday Daskalea, who is hiding in her open cell. A prison staffer dispatches a posse of three inmates to retrieve her. The guards, she is told, will be "mad" if she doesn't perform for the crowd.

As Daskalea began stripping, another prisoner poured baby oil on her and started rubbing against her while guards cheered them on, she stated months later in court testimony. It was the fourth time that month that guards had coerced prisoners into stripping. Prisoners and guards acknowledged in depositions that the strip dancing was instigated by a corrections officer and was never reported by other officers on the scene. At least a dozen guards were eventually implicated. "I didn't want any trouble," Daskalea told the *Washington Post*. "In a very sick way,

the stripping thing endeared me to many of the officers."

But that good will quickly disappeared when Daskalea filed a sexual harassment lawsuit. Guards immediately threw her in lockdown for nearly a month, and prison staff deprived her of soap, toothpaste, toothbrush and toilet paper. Daskalea was required to sleep on the concrete floor, Smith of the NWLC says, and had to manually stimulate a male prison guard in order to get soap.

Prisoners have few allies or legal protections, and what avenues for recourse they do have are being cut off. The case of Heather Wells, for example, hinges on far more than proof of paternity. She must also convince a highly skeptical jury that she was raped. That's because so-called "consensual sex" between inmates and prison employees in Washington state is not explicitly outlawed. Only after Wells' case stirred up front-page news did Washington legislators propose banning prison sex outright—but they have yet to pass the law.

Meanwhile, the 1996 Prison Litigation Reform Act (PLRA), which requires inmates to pay exorbitant court fees to file suit and imposes stiff penalties for sloppy lawsuits, has had a chilling effect on legal attempts to combat prison rape. The law, according to HRW, "has seriously compromised the ability of any entity, private or public, to combat sexual misconduct in custody." The PLRA also drastically curtails prison improvements by automatically terminating court orders aimed at stopping unlawful conditions or abuse after two years—regardless of the degree of compliance.

Prisoner rape is aided and abetted by a legal system in which inmates are deemed incurable criminals, forever guilty until proven innocent. As HRW found, "States' failure to uphold their own laws regarding custodial sexual misconduct reflects their reluctance to prosecute such crimes, largely because of an ingrained belief ... that the prisoner was complicit in the sexual abuse committed against her."

Compounding this problem, prisons commonly require inmates to confront accused employees informally before they can file any grievance, increasing the likelihood of retaliation and discouraging many women from raising a complaint. "[Guards] have a tremendous psychological advantage," Wells' attorney Bauer says. "They are trained to control prisoners."

Rape is the most egregious extension of a national trend toward reducing rehabilitation and maximizing all forms of control. Last year in California, for instance, the Department of Corrections unveiled new rules requiring military-style haircuts for all prisoners, and prohibiting facial hair and earrings. Yet the prohibitions against rape are meager.

Nonetheless, women in prison continue to fight back—and not just for monetary compensation. "Nothing can compensate my clients for the harm that was done to them," attorney Michael Bien told reporters after winning \$500,000 for the three women who were raped and beaten at a federal penitentiary in California. "For them it was very critical that the settlement not only include monetary damages but also changes that will help other women who are still in prison." ■

Christopher D. Cook is a freelance journalist who has written for *The Nation* and the *Christian Science Monitor*. **Christian Parenti's** most recent piece for this magazine was "Crossing Borders" (March 22). Special thanks to Prison Legal News.

PRIVATE CRIMES

The problem of rape and sexual assault is exacerbated in America's booming private for-profit prisons, where guards have minimal accountability to prisoners or the public. Many inmates in corporate facilities are contracted out from overcrowded public prisons several states and thousands of miles away, making it all the more difficult for abused inmates to get justice.

When Barrillee Banister and 77 other female Oregon inmates were shipped off to a Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) facility in Florence, Ariz., correctional officers ("COs") pressured them to perform strip teases and sexual favors, and allegedly offered hush money to silence their complaints. "While in segregation other Oregon female inmates and I were approached by several male COs and asked to perform strip dances for them while they watched outside the isolation cell door window," Banister said in a written statement. "This later led to more serious sexual activity such as kissing, hugging, groping, masturbation, oral sex and sexual intercourse. ... We were in fear that if we refused to submit to the COs' requests that our safety and well-being would be in jeopardy."

When Banister requested a transfer back to Oregon, CCA officials offered to place \$100 in her books account if she kept quiet. She refused. **C.C. & C.P.**



PITTSBURGH

Who speaks for working-class families these days? The Democrats still claim to, but there are other untested contenders, including the two-year-old Labor Party, who want the job and think they can do it better.

Despite Democrats' relief at the 1998 election results, they are clearly losing ground. Since Bill Clinton was elected president in 1992, support for Democratic congressional candidates has dropped by 9 percent among voters who are high school dropouts, and only slightly less among voters who graduated from high school or have some college education, according to Ruy Teixeira of the Economic Policy Institute. Many more working-class voters have simply dropped out. Voter turnout this year was the lowest for a midterm election since 1942, with lower-income participation dropping the fastest. This year's dip in turnout for Republicans—much greater than among Democrats—and the mobilization of Black and union voters nevertheless saved the day. But did saving the Democrats represent political salvation for workers?

That is highly unlikely, in the view of the 1,400 delegates who gathered in Pittsburgh on November 13-15 for the 1998 Labor Party convention, the first since its 1996 founding in Cleveland. The Labor Party is devoted to articulating working-class aspirations that will change the boundaries of political debate in America and offer a disciplined, uncompromising view of what organized labor wants politically. With its base in a small group of national unions and dozens of locals around the country representing more than 1 million members, the Labor Party is serving as an ideological statement of dissatisfaction with the Democrats and an expression of the need for the labor movement to promote its own agenda. "Not only do the two parties represent business interests," says Labor Party co-chairman Robert Clark, secretary-treasur-

er of the United Electrical Workers (UE), "but on some level, everyone knows that the working class does not have political power."

Labor Party backers see the decline of the Democrats as a working-class party as their opportunity, and various straws in the wind suggest voters are open to alternatives. A series of polls in 1992 when Ross Perot emerged as a presidential contender showed that three-fifths of voters were interested in an alternative to the Democrats and Republicans. The number of voters registering as independents or for minor parties also has grown strongly over the past three decades.

Indeed, the highest turnout in this year's election was in Minnesota, where Jesse Ventura mobilized young first-time voters and traditional working-class Democrats to win his third-party candidacy. "If a wrestler can be elected in Minnesota, anything is possible," says Tony Mazzocchi, the longtime Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW) official who is largely responsible for the creation of the Labor Party through more than a decade of steady organizing.

At the Pittsburgh convention, the Labor Party took its first step toward electoral politics. The party had decided at its founding convention not to run candidates because the majority, especially the union leaders, thought it was important first to build support and to begin organizing public backing for Labor Party ideas. But a vocal minority, concentrated in the party's geographically based chapters, argued that it made no sense to have a political party that didn't run candidates. Striking a compromise, the convention established tough criteria that any potential candidate must meet. "We wanted to do it in a context that did not marginalize us," says OCAW President Robert Wages, a leading Labor Party supporter. "It would be important to win but more

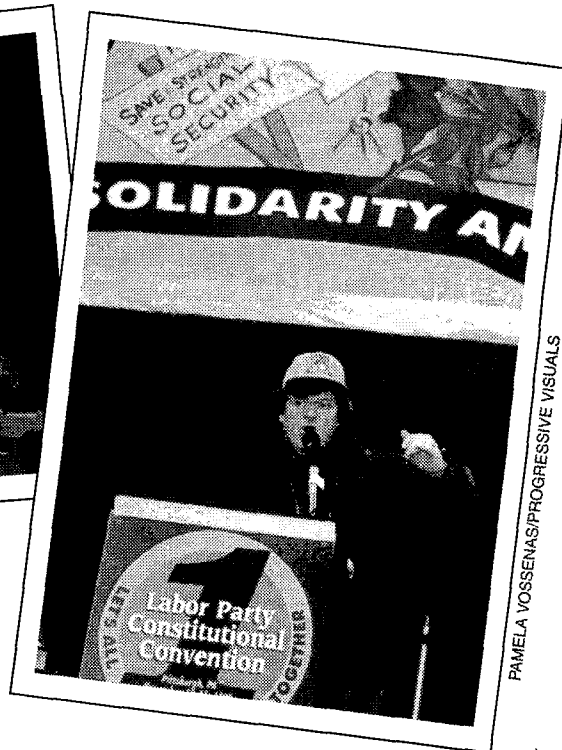
important to be credible."

Most party leaders don't expect to be able to contest elections within the next few years, though Mazzocchi notes, "If this economy unravels, our scenario is speeded up." But above all, the party doesn't want to run campaigns that muster only 2 or 3 percent of the vote. "The initial campaigns will be campaigns of the entire Labor Party and will determine what the entire country thinks of us," says UE District President Carl Rosen. "They need to be very well-targeted with maximum resources to show what it is possible to do."

Although individual delegates at this year's convention seemed more flexible, most national leaders disdain the idea of running for low-level local races. And once again, the convention rejected the idea of "fusion" politics, endorsing a progressive Democrat but on the Labor Party line, for example. Mazzocchi argues that the Labor Party needs to establish a clear identity as an alternative to the Democrats, and that fusion offers little real influence to labor but simply opens opportunities for corruption, as happened with the Liberal Party in New York.



"We should be the second party in this country," filmmaker Michael Moore (right) told the Labor Party faithful. "I want the Democrats and the Republicans to move into the single party that they are."



Most party efforts will go into the fight for universal single-payer health care. The party will hold local public hearings and house meetings, train organizers and conduct one-on-one solicitation of individual citizens. To support "Just Health Care," organizers hope to form a "Committee of One Million," which will run health care advocacy ads in local newspapers. In some parts of the country, Labor Party members are preparing to work with other advocates of single-payer health insurance, but nationally, the main objective is to advocate a more comprehensive alternative to small-scale reforms like a patient's bill of rights. If there is sufficient cooperation among universal health care advo-

The labor movement should find its own political voice and demand a new

Despite the move toward electoral politics, the Labor Party continues to reflect the view expressed by Dave Campbell, president of a large California OCAW local and chair of the party electoral commission. "The majority here think we have to organize our way to power," he says. "We can't just elect our way to power. Some people elevate elections to a strategy, not a tactic, and see elections as an organizing tool rather than seeing organization, as we do, as leading to elections."

To expand its modest organizing efforts thus far, the Labor Party has adopted new campaigns to build support among working-class voters for "Just Health Care" (primarily single-payer universal health insurance), workers' rights ("bringing the bill of rights into the workplace"), preserving Social Security and fair trade (enforcing labor rights and environmental protection in the global economy). It pledged to continue its campaign for a constitutional amendment guaranteeing a right to a job at a living wage (a minimum of \$10 an hour), even though few party chapters or unions had been enthusiastic about the amendment petition drive over the past two years.

cates, the Labor Party effort could strengthen a new and growing grass-roots demand for fundamental health care reform.

There was an undercurrent of tension over local chapter autonomy between the geographically based chapters, which attract more ideologically oriented individuals, and the unions, which include people with a strong sense of class identity, but who have little involvement in left politics. Overall, however, the convention was remarkably democratic and respectful of differences. For example, it voted to strengthen the plank on women's reproductive rights to specifically support a woman's right to "continue or terminate a pregnancy" but not to use the word "abortion."

The core support of the Labor Party comes from such unions as the OCAW, UE, California Nurses Association, United Mineworkers, Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees, American Federation of Government Employees and the West Coast longshore union as well as union locals. (The big Service Employees and Electronic Workers (IUE)

unions contribute but do not officially endorse the party.) Most unions, if they do anything more than endorse and send money, seem to use the Labor Party as a way of educating local leaders. The party claims more than 10,000 members, but membership has grown slowly. The party has set a goal of doubling its membership every year in the near future, partly by encouraging chapters to divide into smaller organizing committees.

Like many fledgling organizations, the Labor Party faces a dilemma: It needs to recruit more institutions and individuals to be able to undertake its ambitious plans. But without more meaningful activity for members, this is difficult. Bob Kingsley, director of organizing for UE, compared the situation to a union organizing drive: "You've got to get your act together before the challenge to power. ... [But] people need something more to do. There's boredom around signing up another member or chapter. We need to get members more involved."

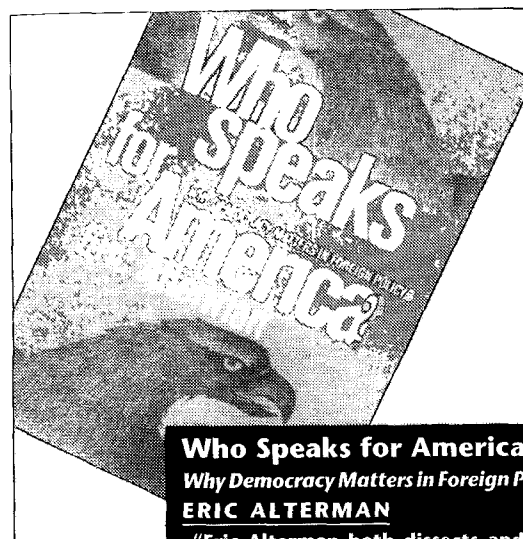
Ralph Nader urged the convention to see itself as not just a party of workers but also as a party of consumers, taxpayers, voters and small savers, broadly critical of big corporations and focused on "the central contest of politics, [which] must be the maldistribution of power and wealth." The big question was simply how much time and energy the party could bring to its work. "You will have what it takes to have a major party," Nader told delegates, "if you can recruit 1 million people who make a contribution of \$25 a year each and volunteer 100 to 150 hours a year."

There are ample reasons to be skeptical. Minor parties historically have had little success in America's non-parliamentary system, where there is no proportional representation and a strong emphasis on election from geographical districts where the "winner takes all." Yet there are also shortcomings about all current labor political

distribution of wealth and power.

strategies, including the dominant approach of hitching labor's fortunes closely to the Democrats. The ultimate judgment will come as the nascent Labor Party tries to recruit members, conduct campaigns on public policy and ultimately run candidates. At the very least it gives additional force to the idea that the labor movement should find its own political voice demanding a new distribution of both wealth and power.

Even if it does not succeed in becoming a major party, the Labor Party could succeed in pressuring the Democratic Party and influencing the national dialogue, as well as bolstering the progressive wing of the labor movement. Simply educating more workers and union leaders and getting them involved in politics has some merit. "If I can get several thousand of my members to join in an issue-based organization," Wages said, "I know they'll vote more correctly than they would have before. If that means voting for more progressive Democrats rather than Republicans, it's a victory." ■



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Crimes of the Century

By Jefferson Decker

In February 1941, Henry Luce claimed the 20th century for the United States. In an essay for *Life*, published nine months before Pearl Harbor, the media mogul castigated Americans for acting "nervous," "gloomy" and "apathetic" in the face of fascism. The U.S. government, he said, was shirking its duty not simply to defeat Hitler, but to export its "democratic principles throughout the world." The United States, by then, was uniquely strong among democracies politically and economically. The time had come, said Luce, the son of missionaries, to "lift the life of mankind from the levels of the beasts to what the Psalmist called a little lower than the angels." The piece won him widespread acclaim. When the United States finally joined the war, the "American Century"—as Luce titled the piece—was officially proclaimed.

Luce's sentiments can hardly be

last major ideological opponents fade further into the past, it is hard to argue that the 20th century could belong to anyone but us. Yes, the editorialists of the moment are saying: This is the American Century. The important question is, "Why?"

Why the American Century?

By Oliver Zunz
University of Chicago
254 pages, \$24

The American Century

By Harold Evans with Gail Buckland
and Kevin Baker
Knopf
710 pages, \$50

In *Why the American Century?*, historian Oliver Zunz describes the "American Century" as an "ideological construction," a group of ideas shared by some of the most prominent leaders of

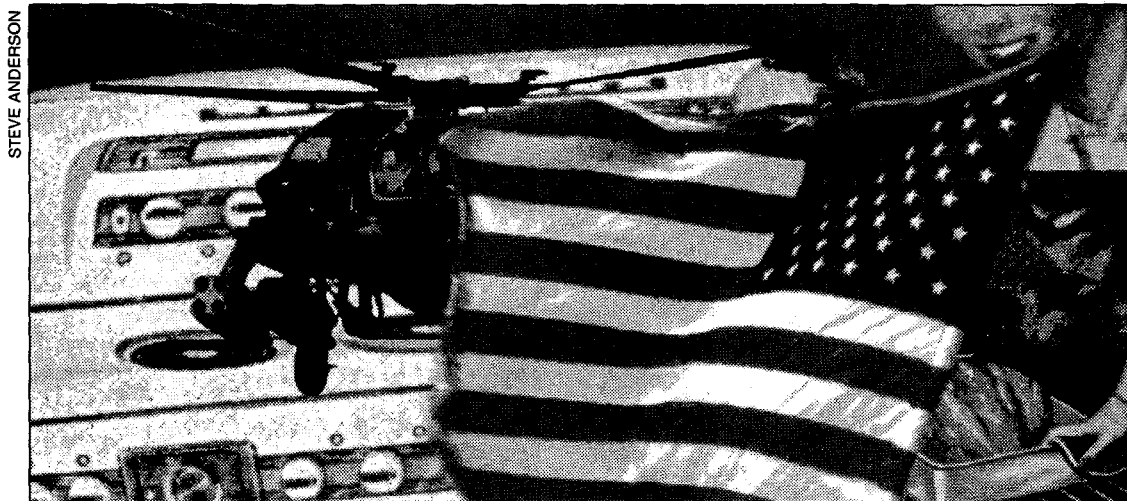
rations, research universities and institutes, government agencies, and foundations ... was the prerequisite for the 'American century.' The "reorganization of knowledge," he says, not merely wealth and military power, allowed the United States to expand its system around the globe.

Throughout Zunz's history, professors, managers, lawyers, inventors, scientists and government bureaucrats interact, creating new ways to map, record and analyze information. These new knowledges had an impact on the academy, where the new social sciences of psychology and economics were born, tested and refined, as well as on business and the economy, where they were adapted into new ways to market and promote consumer goods. But Zunz focuses mostly on their impact on how Americans thought about society. Here too, ideas had consequences. Tests of

mental capacity—however crude—held out the idea of an unimpeachable meritocratic elite. New theories of what makes people conform to standards and norms were put to test by behavioral psychology. And the advent of polling and other demographic research made it seem as if one could identify a new type: the "average American."

From this, a number of prominent elites

fashioned the public ideology that Zunz calls the "American Century." They developed a liberalism—as Progressive-era reformers like Herbert Croly were beginning to define it—based on the supposed interests of that average American. They promoted a "new social contract" that integrated Americans into a single consumer society managed by this new matrix of professionals in large organizations. Eventually, through Keynesian economic policies and the cooperation of



STEVE ANDERSON

called modest; they betray a remarkable confidence in the belief that the United States knew what was best for the rest of the globe. And as the century winds down, Luce's expression is finding its way back onto book jackets and into headlines, usually as a neat way to sum up the past 10 decades. Isolated from Luce's scolding message, "American Century" fits snugly with America's current, triumphal mood: As the economy hums along and memories of our

the late 19th and early 20th century America. For Zunz, the America described by Luce was the culmination of a decades-long period of transformation in the United States that began before the turn of the century and lasted until World War II. During those years, corporations came to dominate the economy while new universities, institutes and laboratories transformed the knowledge base. Zunz argues that this "newly created matrix of business corpo-

union leaders, they helped build a new middle class that straddled the division between capital and labor. They sought to diffuse some of the most bitter class conflict, pulling workers and managers into the same mass culture—and, thereby, robbing populists, socialists and other radicals of their best issues. By World War II, Zunz argues, the system was powerful enough to be exported to the rest of the world. Zunz presents one such case study: the post-war rebuilding of Japan. Then he stops, noting that his goal was to describe the idea of the American Century, not the implementation of a Pax Americana. Of course it's there, though, that the ideological issues really get interesting, as liberal internationalism interacted with rabid anti-communism. By Korea and Vietnam they meant, for many, the same thing.

As a parsimonious description of the rise of managerial liberalism in the United States, this history works well. What is less clear from his analysis is just why this system would imply an international policy. Though we learn about the "technical and artistic skills" that Luce wanted to "send out" around the globe, there's no explanation of the missionary zeal. In the end, it's still difficult to tell why, precisely, the "American Century" matters—which makes the book finally unsatisfying.

In terms of form, style or approach to history, *The American Century*, by British editor and publisher Harold Evans, could not be more different. Where Zunz's book is brief and scholarly, Evans fills more than 700 oversize pages with text and illustrations. His book took 12 years to put together, with the help of two assistants. The ostensible thesis is triumphant. "The twentieth century," Evans writes in the introduction, "belongs to the United States because of the triumph of its faith in its founding idea ... the idea of a free community of nations linked by friendship and ideas, rather than simply the mechanisms of the balance of power." All was not perfect: "There were times of paranoia in the twenties, forties, and fifties, when good men did nothing and the values of a free society were in jeopardy ... there were occasions of cruelty, intolerance and injustice that wrenched America from its true path." But, all in all, Evans argues, Americans did pretty well. "For all the

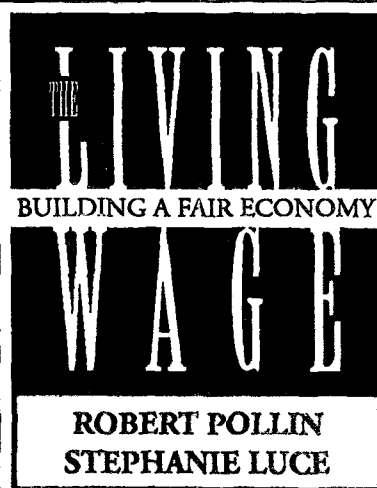
Prominent elites fashioned a liberalism to rob populists, socialists and other radicals of their issues.

rough edges, the 50 years that followed Luce's bugle call vindicated his faith in America." Yet the essays and analysis between introduction and epilogue somehow manage to belie this thesis.

Evans' *American Century* is not quite the 20th. He begins in 1889, when America began its second century of life under the Constitution and began to emerge on the world scene as a full-fledged imperial power. He stops in 1989, with the Cold War nearing an end. The book is divided into 15 chronological chapters. Each begins with several pages of "commentary," in which Evans weighs in on the period's most important political person-

alities and events. The rest is one- or two-page illustrated snippets. Some recount front-page news, others expose sordid details that were covered up until much later. Still more provide a thumbnail sketch of a public person (including two pages on every president) or a brief recounting of acrimonious debates over historical interpretation.

High politics, particularly diplomacy, dominates. That's Evans' choice, and it keeps the book focused. But it makes for some startling omissions. The rise of a new middle-class after World War II, the suburban communities they built—and the new highways that brought them to their jobs—merits but four pages. The great migrations of the '40s, when African-Americans fled the rural South by the thousands for the chance of industrial employment in the Northeast or Midwest, barely receive mention. There is no attempt to explain other social and economic changes, within U.S. borders or between world economic powers. Cultural life, high or low, does



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not rate. How many general American histories these days—even the most stodgy—make no mention whatsoever of Hollywood or rock 'n' roll?

It takes an afternoon to sit down and plow through each of the 15 commentaries. It's not a chore: They're all well-researched, sharply written and opinionated. The first few argue convincingly that American democracy was threatened in the beginning of the century, not by striking workers or Wobblie bombs, but by vast inequalities of wealth that skewed the political system beyond recognition. And they help Evans put together a fine portrait of the social transformations that rocked the country from the 1890s through the 1930s, from the official "closing" of the frontier to the Dust Bowl and New Deal. Later chapters are not always so interesting. Although the commentaries get longer when dealing with more recent history, their scope shrinks. (This is particularly true of the commentary on the Vietnam War, which traces U.S. conduct through four administrations but always from the perspective of a succession of presidential wise men.) One can gather what Evans considers the defining moments of the American Century—efforts of goodwill, like the passage of the Civil and Voting Rights Acts and the Great Society; and moral failures, like the drift into outright imperialism during the Spanish-American War.

But there is a better way to approach this book. Sit it down. Start flipping pages. Keep turning until a photograph catches your eye. Stare at it for a minute, read the caption, move on. Soon enough

a small file of images will have accumulated in your imagination. You will have encountered a Depression-era "Okie" family, photographed by Dorothea Lange at a camp in Exeter, Calif.; and a white, middle-class family standing in front of a year's worth of Wheaties and Crisco and canned evaporated milk—

To Evans, tragedies of the last 100 years are "rough edges" to an otherwise virtuous American triumph.

the "typical" food budget for 1951. You will have seen Martin Luther King Jr., arms crossed, staring ahead—a portrait of militancy; and James R. Jones, Grand Dragon of the North Carolina Klan, equally intense in the service of reaction. You will be struck by Dean Acheson's smile, frozen stiffer than his handlebar mustache, upon being caught in an elevator with Joe McCarthy; or by J. Robert Oppenheimer's eyes, sunken and scared, as he drags on a cigarette during his security hearing.

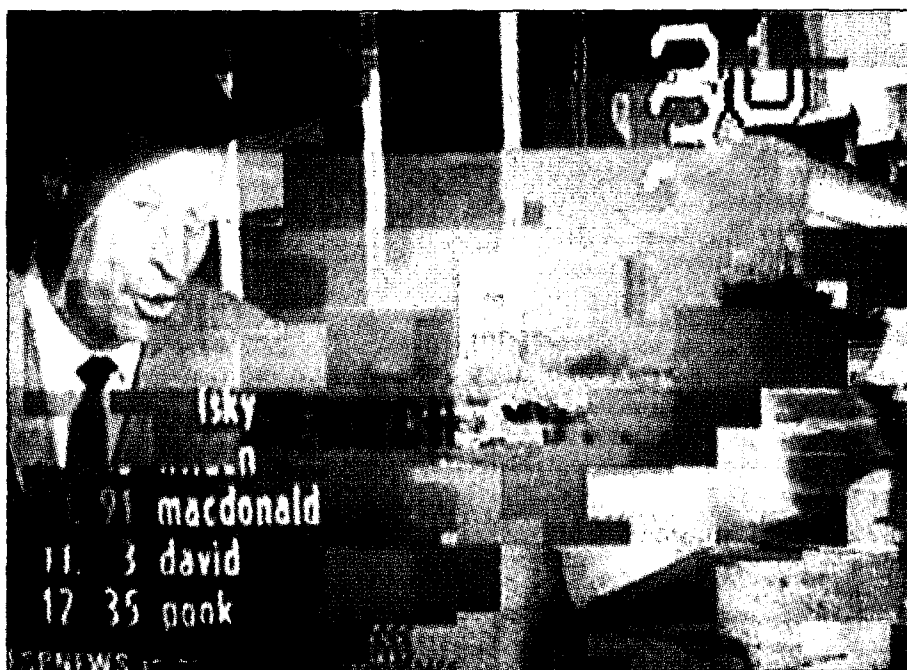
There is, of course, more: Mohammed Mosaddeq, Iran's CIA-deposed prime minister, bald and

disheveled as he argues with the Shah's tribunal; General Pinochet, Chile's CIA-supported autocrat, looking menacing behind a pair of dark glasses; an American soldier lying prone and drinking from his canteen on a field somewhere in Cambodia; caskets returning home from Lebanon. Keep turning pages: Has your faith in America's founding idea been vindicated? Are the "rough edges" nothing more?

In truth, it's not fair of Evans to pin national vindication on a few decades of history—or for his readers to be forced to make sense of history that way. His book amasses enough facts, details, photographs and art to be worthwhile without the big theory. The danger is that the latter will subsume the former. Triumphalism is worrisome not because it celebrates too many victories but because it obliterates the memory of failure—those times when high-minded founding principles get warped beyond recognition by opposing principles or real-life exigencies. Together, Evans and Zunz say a great deal about how the United States appropriated the 20th century. What to think about that is inevitably more complicated. ■

Jefferson Decker, former culture editor of *In These Times*, now lives in Cambridge, Mass.

From **Imagebomb**, a multimedia project by the Imperfect Fluids Arts Collective, an internationally exhibiting organization Lee Wells founded three years ago. Wells says that the collective's work is a response to the "dead discourses of spectacle," subverting the tools of mass media "so that something will burst out, will escape; words beneath words, image over image." Since 1996, Wells has collaborated extensively with Carrie Holt.



Holiday Reading

The staff of *In These Times* share their ideas for what to read during the holidays.

Day Trippers and Overnighters

Jim Rinnert, art director

Good fiction can work like an armchair vacation. It takes us out of the here-and-now and into another world drawn whole and complete, peopled with characters whose principal attraction, perhaps, is that their lives are not our own. And it's usually cheaper than airfare.

For the short haul, *Gates of Eden* (Weisbach Morrow, \$24), Ethan Coen's new book of stories, is an enticing series of quirky, whimsical, sometimes delirious trips. Through Coen's original imagination and wit, even the familiar destination (like Minneapolis) can quickly morph into an exotic, potentially dangerous getaway. And getting there is half the fun. His unexpected turns and roadside attractions are perfectly tuned for the short story vehicle.

If you like the Coen brothers' movies (such as *Raising Arizona*, *Fargo* and this year's *The Big Lebowski*), you'll love Ethan's book: 14 short guided tours through a world whose landmarks and population may be familiar—but not at all like your own.

For the longer trip, nothing can beat Patrick O'Brian's ongoing series of sea-faring novels set in the British Navy during the Napoleonic wars (1803-1814). *The Hundred Days* (Norton, \$24), nineteenth in the series and published last month, was eagerly awaited by readers numbering in the millions. Each novel takes the two principal characters—Captain Jack Aubrey (later commodore) and his ship's surgeon, Stephen Maturin—on another mission in the war against Napoleon. The two characters and their close bond of friendship are among the most attractive in fiction.

O'Brian's voyage is outward-bound, featuring spare and elegant descriptions of his characters' material world and the geography they cover: the class structure and routines of shipboard life; Maturin's

observations as an amateur naturalist; the historically accurate battles; the intricate naval and global politics. O'Brian delivers a wealth of lucid detail without impeding the direction and momentum of the storytelling. And if the interior life of his characters is something we're left to map out for ourselves, there are clues (in their interactions and dialogue) to reveal just enough inner territory to leave us always wanting more.

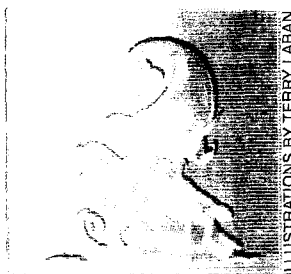
Some of us following the series are worried that the set may have been completed: In *The Hundred Days* the tyrant Napoleon is finally defeated. Whether O'Brian continues the journey or lets it end here, the Aubrey-Maturin books are worth the trip.

Off the Road

Joe Knowles, culture editor

Quick question: What do indoor malls, neighborhood decay, crappy bus service, environmental racism, tacky architecture, noise pollution, suburban sprawl, the greenhouse effect, classism, bombing runs over Baghdad, corporate welfare, the national decline in civility and public space and more than 40,000 American deaths per year all have in common? Answer: cars. In *Asphalt Nation: How the Automobile Took Over America and How We Can Take It Back* (California, \$16.95), Jane Holtz Kay, architecture critic for *The Nation*, focuses an entertaining—yet scorchingly pointed—laser beam on what is normally taken for granted: how we get around.

While America's remarkably masochistic love affair with the automobile remains an accepted, even vigorously promoted, feature of daily life, Kay adds



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Paul Sullivan, Director, Nat'l Gulf War Resource Ctr.

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a comprehensive voice to the growing body of citizens refusing to accept the damage—social, economic, environmental—cars do on an everyday basis. Beginning her book with the slogan of the American Automobile Manufacturers Association (“What America drives, drives America”), she also explores the myriad ways that transportation circumscribes our lives. She shows how we have created car-choked cities, robbing once gleamingly civilized mass transit systems—and other vital city services—of funds to build yet more roads and provide evermore tax breaks to suburban home builders. All the while in those suburbs, the vast world of superstores, freeways and parking lots effectively programs those who can’t drive—children, seniors, the disabled and the poor—out of the civic equation. And car drivers themselves, isolated in steel bubbles ferrying them from the workplace to the private mall to the private home, have nearly seceded from the public realm altogether. Instead of scolding Americans about “civility”—all the rage with self-righteous pundits and academics of varying political stripe—Kay actually charts how our lives became so shrill, “from front porch to front seat.”

While her journalistically thorough thrashing of “the car culture” alone makes *Asphalt Nation* worthwhile, the book should become a classic for its ultimately aesthetic conviction. Her trade as an architecture critic marvelously informs a humanist critique of what she calls “drive-by design,” space created for cars, not people: “The scale swells to the overblown size of the highway, standardized, isolated, and lacking texture. The pace is that of a seventy-mile-an-hour driver viewing only land-blurring backdrops and featureless boxes. The pattern is the unleashed, randomly moving vehicle, not the defined and ordered sidewalks, entrances, and facades of traditional pedestrian streets. ... Given free reign to trample any place, sacred or profane, the highway defined as a straight line between two points negates the human dimension.”

She concludes with a hopeful section detailing the forces gathering to humanize our cities, from citizen campaigns for urban growth boundaries to bicyclists’

and skaters’ joyous “Critical Mass” rides through rush-hour traffic.

Another great humanizing force is written about at length by Gary Giddins in *Visions of Jazz: The First Century* (Oxford, \$35). A prose stylist on the jazz beat for *The Village Voice* for 25 years, Giddins presents an undulating 690 pages (weighing in at 2.5 pounds) on the history of what *Ladies Home Journal* long ago branded “the expression of protest against law and order, the bolshevik element of license striving for expression in music.” These days, jazz is big business and rather high-brow, having entered what Giddins calls its “marble-bust era” of institutional teaching and performance seasons at Lincoln Center. But instead of playing to contemporary corporate idealizations of the past—jazz, Giddins writes, “resists the funneling of time as strenuously as it does facile evaluations”—*Visions of Jazz* channels various currents of jazz history through the music of a series of individual artists—many famous, some relatively minor—from the past century. This approach leaves off a few greats—Bix Beiderbecke and Bessie Smith immediately come to mind—but the masters not getting their own chapter do lurk satisfyingly enough in the background of Giddins’ expansive and delightful canvas.

All Dressed Up, No Place to Fight

Kristin Kolb, news editor

Ten years after the Cold War’s end, little has changed for our behemoth military: The defense budget itself is just getting over the largesse of the Reagan/Bush years. Now at \$260 billion annually, when adjusted for inflation it adds up to about the same amount allotted during the Carter administration—during the heat of the arms race. Now that the Soviet empire has disinte-

grated, shouldn’t we be parceling our resources in new directions?

That’s the subject of William Greider’s new book, *Fortress America: The American Military and the Consequences of Peace* (Public Affairs, \$22). Greider tours our military industrial complex, from army warehouses and naval vessels to large weapons factories. Always provocative and often startling, he pinpoints some of the most egregious problems facing an aging empire sorely needing to redefine itself.

Now at peace, the military is floundering, spending billions on stockpiling sophisticated weapons too expensive to use. Still training soldiers for a Soviet-style enemy, it focuses on outdated strategies and wobbles toward a future enemy it cannot define.

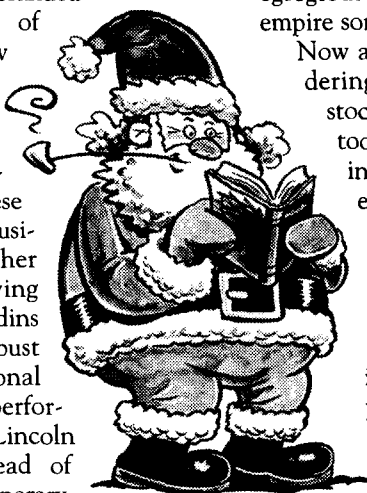
Greider does offer some remedies. Rather than standing aloof from U.N. peacekeeping efforts, the United States should restructure its military-industrial complex to focus on creating international security

forces worthy of the world’s trust. This would mean a stronger collaboration between diplomats and the military. In whole, *Fortress America* offers a blistering analysis of the defense industry in tune with Greider’s other devastating works.

A literary genre often attempted—but usually with lousy results—is erotica. Happily, two young New York editors, Genevieve Field and Rufus Griscom, have recruited a talented array of artists, writers and scholars and developed *Nerve*, an online magazine that could be considered *Salon*’s bedroom companion.

Started in 1997, *New York* called *Nerve* “the Web’s most intelligent form of erotica.” The editors themselves shy away from the term: “*Nerve* set out to be more graphic, forthright and topical than ‘erotica,’” they say, “but less blockheadedly masculine than ‘pornography.’” *Nerve*’s purpose is an exploration of “real sexual experience,” not the circus-like, ludicrous fantasies proliferating on the market.

This fall, Broadway Books has published *Nerve: Literate Smut* (\$15), a sampling of the magazine’s most popular



content. Wildly smart, the anthology contains not only fiction, but some fascinating reporting and analysis concerning sexuality in its various manifestations. An interview with filmmaker and photographer Richard Kern (known best for his *New York Girls* series) explores the unique philosophy of his art. Anthropologist Meredith F. Small discusses the prolific sexuality of the bonobo ape. Even ex-Surgeon General Dr. Joycelyn Elders gives her take on "The Dreaded 'M' Word." The book also is peppered with intriguing photos by Kern and Andres Serrano, among others. *Nerve* offers intelligent, sexy reading with wit and style.

Working Globally

David Moberg, senior editor

What used to be the "Asian economic crisis" is steadily becoming global. It's an apt moment to read *Global Squeeze: The Coming Crisis for First-World Nations* by Richard C. Longworth (Contemporary Books, \$24.95). Longworth, a top-notch economics correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune*, provides a clear, crisply written introduction to global economic trends that is critical of mindless deference to free markets. With an emphasis on comparisons of how Europe, Japan and the United States deal with problems generated by the growth of international finance and transnational corporations, Longworth effectively drives home the message that societies have choices in how they want to limit and regulate the power of the global market, both through domestic politics and international regulation. While his thinking is often sophisticated, the presentation is as accessible as a daily newspaper story (and indeed the book's most serious shortcoming is the tendency to break the narrative into short sections, which gives it a choppy feel while nevertheless making heavy topics more digestible). Longworth's own sympathies tilt to the European "social market," but he insists that countries will have to take into account their own traditions in forging a more civilized response to raw global capitalism.

The 1995 election of John Sweeney as president of the AFL-CIO unleashed a flood of hopes among unionists and

their supporters after two decades of painful decline. There is also now a flood of writings about the new labor movement, much of it offering advice on what is to be done. Three new or soon-to-be-released collections of essays catalog what is—or ought to be—new with organized labor. They include reportage, analysis and programmatic advocacy and in each case are written by both union officials or practitioners as well as academic or journalistic observers. (Full disclosure: I have essays in two of these collections but no financial stake.) Jo-Ann Mort's *Not Your Father's Union Movement: Inside the AFL-CIO* (Verso, \$20) focuses, though not exclusively, on describing and evaluating AFL-CIO initiatives since Sweeney's election. Many of the essays in *A New Labor Movement for the New Century* (Monthly Review, \$24), edited by Gregory Mantsios, are derived from presentations to a conference held in New York the weekend before Sweeney's victory, with revisions and additions. The essays in Bruce Nissen's *Which Direction for Organized Labor?* (Wayne State University Press, \$28.95) are grouped under the headings of organizing, outreach and internal transformation of unions, and typically both report on efforts already undertaken and projections of what the labor movement needs to do. None of these is bestseller material, but they're all full of good, progressive ideas and examples of what the movement is doing and could do more vigorously. In a few years, observers may want to see how many of these ideas worked, or were ever seriously tried.

Remember Rwanda

Craig Aaron, features editor

In talking about the Holocaust, everyone from survivors to school children has been ingrained with a simple mantra: "Never forget." More than 50 years after the fall of Auschwitz, one needs only to look at *Schindler's List*, the Holocaust museum in Washington and the musical versions of *The Diary of Anne Frank* being produced in Jewish Community Centers across the country

to see that we remember the lessons of the six million.

Why then have we forgotten Rwanda so quickly? Just four years ago, more than 800,000 people were killed in just 100 days, a mass killing at nearly three times the rate Jews were murdered by the Nazis. Make no mistake: The Rwandan "final solution" was just as organized and calculated as Hitler's, but Hutus hacked their Tutsi neighbors to death with clubs and machetes instead of sending them to the gas chambers.

The manipulation of the masses by the "Hutu Power" elite has been largely lost in Western coverage, which dismisses the decimation of the Tutsi population as "an epic struggle between ethnic groups." But in his phenomenal book, *We Wish To Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories From Rwanda* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$25) Philip Gourevitch, a *New Yorker* staff writer, traces the history, strategy and tragedy of the Rwandan genocide through the stories of both killers and survivors.

He also exposes the complicity of the international community in the slaughter. "As far as the political, military and economic interests of the worlds powers go, [Rwanda] might as well be Mars," Gourevitch writes. "But Rwanda, unlike Mars, is populated by human beings, and when Rwanda had a genocide, the world's powers left Rwanda to it." Then, after Paul Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Front finally defeated Hutu Power forces and started to rebuild the country, "the world sent blankets, beans and bandages to camps controlled by the killers, apparently hoping that everyone would behave nicely in the future."

We Wish To Inform You ranks with Ryszard Kapuscinski's *The Soccer War* and Michael Herr's *Dispatches* among the masterpieces of literary reporting. It's impossible to do justice to the stories of Paul Rusesabagina, Odette Nyiramilimo or Pastor Elizaphan Ntakirutimana in this short space. But trust me, Gourevitch's story is one you won't forget. Never. ■



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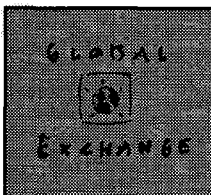
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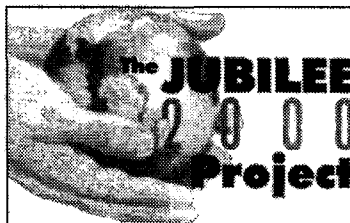
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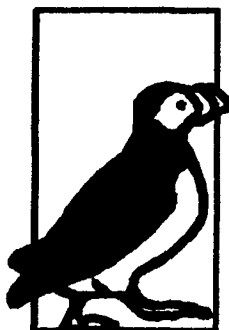
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is that the writers manage to come up with a new supernatural theme every week without ever (despite the ubiquitous crosses) even once vaguely implying the possible existence of God.

This is important, because it's not true of most horror. In overly religious horror—*Rosemary's Baby*, *The Omen*—God might seem infinitely distant, with Satan and his minions pretty obviously in control, but God is still necessary for the whole thing to make sense. The same, I think, is true of horror of the slasher/Freddy Kreuger/*Hellraiser* variety. These are stories about transgression—having sex, not reporting a hit-and-run accident, being a snotty teenager—followed by utterly disproportionate punishment. The ultimate morality is profoundly Judeo-Christian and sadomasochistic; everyone's implicitly corrupt. *You are too*, is the genre's subtext—otherwise, why would you be enjoying this sadistic crap?

Traditional vampire movies are a variation. In a way, they are ultimately about the failure of the French Revolution—which was supposed to kill off all those bloodsucking aristocrats in their castles and usher in a rational world of liberty, equality, fraternity and enlightened commercial self-interest. Of course it didn't work. The Count refuses to stay dead. Because deep inside, the movies suggest, we don't really want him to. Eroticized cruelty and domination keep resurfacing because they are rooted in the very nature of our desires. Again, the proof is in the audience.

Yet *Buffy* not only avoids such sadistic pleasures, it openly mocks the underlying morality:

BUFFY: (Trying to bluff her way into a fundamentalist church) You know, I just ... I woke up and I looked in the mirror and I thought, hey! What's with all this sin? I need to change! I'm ... I'm dirty. I'm ... I'm bad, with the sex, and the envy and that loud music us kids listen to nowadays.

(Blank stares.)

(Sigh.) Oh, I just suck at undercover. Where's Ken?
(Kicks down door.)

In fact, its moral premise is precisely the opposite. Vampire-slaying has to be kept secret. As a result, almost everyone in Sunnydale believes Buffy and company are juvenile delinquents: violent, lazy, irresponsible, disobedient. Bad. In reality, they are almost unimaginably self-sacrificing and good. In this sense, *Buffy* is a kind of anti-horror.

The godless cosmology is something that's been developing for a long time, across anything from superhero comic books to *Dungeons and Dragons*. What I really want to draw attention to, however, is the underlying ethic. It would be hard to imagine a healthier one. People—most people, anyway—mean well, but being good is difficult (*Buffy* characters are always fretting over whether they really did the right thing) and power tends to make you stupid or insane. It's a difficult ethos to maintain in an adventure fantasy. After

all, the whole point of such fantasies is, usually, to fabricate a situation where there is an obvious right thing to do—even more, where that right thing involves sorts of violent behavior that would otherwise be wrong. Therein lies the pleasure. It's not that *Buffy* doesn't do this: We are still talking about a show about teenagers killing demons. But even the fantasy element has a sort of wistful quality.

If nothing else, *Buffy* reminds us how much '60s-style youth rebellion was premised on an assumption of security and prosperity: Why put up with all this stodginess when life could be so good? Today's rebellious youth, rather, are reduced to struggling desperately to keep hell from entirely engulfing the earth. Such, I suppose, is the fate of a generation that has been robbed of its fundamental right to dream of a better

world. The very notion of being able to take part in a relatively democratically organized group of comrades, engaged in a struggle to save humanity from its authoritarian monsters, is now itself a wild utopian fantasy—not just a means to one. But cynics take note: If the mushrooming success of *Buffy* means anything, it's that this is one fantasy which surprising numbers of the Slacker Generation do have. ■

David Graeber is a professor of anthropology at Yale.



Buffy, Sunnydale High stakeholder.

Cakewalk

A quarterly journal about contemporary art, culture, music, & the natural sciences ... but mostly art.

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Some years ago, calling himself E.G. Eccarius wrote a novel called *Last Days of Jesus Christ, Vampire*. Admittedly, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, TV cult sensation, does not aspire to quite this level of subversive silliness. But there are times when it comes close—it's also quite possibly the best show on television.

Quick background. Hoards of demons menace mankind. They tend to accumulate in the white-bread suburb of Sunnydale, California, mainly because the Hellmouth, a kind of font of bad mystic energy, is located directly beneath Sunnydale High. In Sunnydale, mysterious deaths and disappearances are an almost daily occurrence.

Arrives one Buffy Summers, recently expelled from school in L.A. for burning down a gym. In an ordinary world, Buffy would have probably ended up a slightly less affluent version of Alicia Silverstone's mall habitué in *Clueless*; as it happens, she is the Slayer, reluctant hero chosen by mysterious powers to lead humanity's war against the vampires. To her aid comes Giles, her Watcher, who has just transferred from the British Museum to become Sunnydale High's librarian, filling its shelves (in a kind of fundamentalist's worst nightmare) with vast leather-bound tomes on demonology. A band of misfits accumulates around them: class clown Xander Harris, timid computer hacker Willow Rosenberg, spoiled Valley Girl Cordelia and mellow lead guitarist (cum werewolf) Oz—not to mention Angel, whom Buffy fondly calls her "cradle-robbing, creature of the night boyfriend"—a vampire of once legendary cruelty, who has spent the last couple centuries feeling guilty after a Gypsy curse restored his soul. They are united in shifting webs of mutual love, trust, jealousy, desire and annoyance—conspiring to save the world on a regular basis as Buffy desperately tries to maintain a C average and head off efforts to kick her out of school.

There are a lot of obvious things you can say about *Buffy*. In the show's first season, a student becomes invisible because no one notices her; in the end, she's whisked away by the FBI for training as a government assassin. In the second, rich frat boys turn out to owe their wealth to an evil snake

god, whom they sacrifice in the framework of a movement (Xander: "I guess the rich really are different"). A slithering snake sets off a wave of corporate bankruptcies across America. And sometimes the supernatural element is a simply obvious mirror for real life: As when Buffy, having run away from home, gets a job as a waitress and sees herself headed for a life of drudgery—until she discovers a band of demons who have been enslaving teenage runaways to labor in dark satanic mills beneath the earth, spewing them out, broken and useless, at about the age of 65. Yet in one way it is decidedly unlike real life: Demonesses, after all, cannot beheaded (though having Buffy lead the rebellion with a hammer in one hand and sword in the other was perhaps a tad much). Real ones can't.

The show's anti-authoritarianism runs throughout. If the series has an ultimate message for the youth of America, it is that whatever instinctual revulsion you might feel toward those who claim to be your betters is not only justified—but things are likely far worse than you could possibly imagine. Ever think of your friend's mother, who constantly pushes her into cheerleading competitions, as a witch? Sure is. Ever suspect the swim coach would



The vampire slayer on the move.

do anything to win that championship? You're right. He would. That the traditional family-values guy courting your divorced mother is some kind of robot, or a sex-crazed killer? He's both. That your sadistic principal is a repressed Nazi child-molester? Well ... we don't have the full story on him yet, but it's probably at least that bad.

GILES: It's a reliquary. Used to house items of religious significance. Most commonly a finger or some other body part from a saint.

BUFFY: Note to self. Religion: creepy.

It should note that *Buffy* is not actually a horror show. It's really a romantic action-comedy without a laugh track, in which, however, good people often die. The cast are uniformly charming; the writers (led by creator Joss Whedon) show a level of wit rarely seen on television. And the most remarkable thing

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